

VALENTE - PERFEITO

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PERFEITO

LET'S  
TALK  
ABOUT  
PORT

# LET'S TALK ABOUT PORT



1948

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VALENTE-PERFEITO

**LET'S  
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AN EDITION OF THE  
INSTITUTO DO VINHO DO PORTO  
1948

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TALK  
ABOUT  
PORT

1948

TIP. J. R. GONÇALVES, LIMITADA  
RUA DA PORTA DO SOL, 32  
PORTO

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

ARTE DE BEBER O VINHO DO PORTO \*

O VINHO DO PORTO, CARTAZ DE PORTUGAL

LE PORTO ET LA BONNE CHÈRE \*<sup>1</sup>

O VINHO DO PORTO . . . ESSE DESCONHECIDO \*

\* Edited by the INSTITUTO DO VINHO DO PORTO.

<sup>1</sup> In collaboration with M. Raymond Brunet.

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TO THE EVER-CHERISHED MEMORY OF

ARTHUR DE MIERRE TURNER,

WHO WAS AN UNSURPASSED AUTHORITY  
ON PORT AND THE DEAREST OF FRIENDS,

THIS BOOKLET,

WHEREIN MUCH OF HIS LOVE AND BUT  
A LITTLE OF HIS KNOWLEDGE OF WINE  
ARE IMPERFECTLY REFLECTED,

IS DEDICATED.

V. P.

*My heartfelt thanks are due to some of my English friends in Oporto, and particularly to Mr. P. J. P. Sumner, of the British Institute, who, at my request, perused the original and very kindly helped me in correcting not a few of its many idiomatic flaws.*

*I also gratefully acknowledge Mr. Sumner's invaluable assistance in revising the printer's proofs.*

## PREFACE

*An Open Letter to Senhor J. C. Valente-Perfeito*

*My dear Senhor Valente-Perfeito,*

*In a rash and unpremeditated moment I accepted your generous invitation to write a preface to this work, the honour of which I was quick, the onus slow, to realise.*

*The reader of a book usually treats the preface in one of three ways. Either he glances perfunctorily through it before settling down to the work proper or else he turns back at the end and reads it last or — more frequently — he ignores it altogether. Third thoughts are often best.*

*If one could only be certain that this preface would be read beforehand, I should elect the role of Port-wine-hater (miserande puer), embark on the thirteenth labour of Hercules, condemn your thesis out of hand and afford readers — no less than yourself — the pleasurable satisfaction of routing me utterly. Fortunately, prefaces are held in such universal disregard that I am spared the uncongenial task. Already the wise connoisseur and*

*eager novice will have passed on to the feast before them, and the Port-wine-hater (whom I cannot dignify with the title of misoenophage, for the Greeks — a cultured people — had no word for such a barbarian) will, if he reads the book, have no need to read the preface.*

*When Shakespeare wrote «good wine needs no bush», he used the proverb to point the moral that a «good play needs no epilogue». Equally, a good book needs no preface, and your present collection of essays (in what vintage did you dip your pen?) stands in no need of aid from prologue, preamble, introduction, dithyramb or apologia before the English-speaking world.*

*I shall not attempt to comment on the excellence with which, in the wisdom of experience and richness of reminiscence, you discreetly reveal the secrets of your subject. I shall not allude to the processes of production, the manipulation, the definition, the conservation, the circulation, the elevation and the consumption of the wine which is known as Port. That is your mystery. I accept the omens with gratitude, gratitude for the gravitas and civitas, gratitude for the tradition, devotion, experience, probity and permanence, for those qualities which represent saneness and stability in a changing world, the*

*symbol of values to which the world must turn again to resume its evolutionary progress. «How infinite in faculty! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!» Can we doubt the nature of the ethereal fluid which ran in the veins of the gods? Dionysus in ancient times was the law-giver and lover of peace. Let the ichor of the old world run in the veins of our leaders and we may yet have a new, a united world organisation. Hyperbole, perhaps. But the Englishman who blessed a bottle of the 1896 vintage with the opinion that «any time you are not drinking Port is a waste of time» was merely adapting Pliny's famous dictum, «All time is wasted which is not spent in study». In vino veritas. In vino amicitia. This is no insignificant link in the chain which binds the oldest historical alliance in the world. The Orator in the University of Cambridge presented His Excellency the Duke of Palmela for the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws with the remark, Non pudet in vino vinculum agnoscere potentissimum.*

*More than three hundred years have elapsed since James Howell wrote, «Good wine makes good blood, causeth good humours, good humours cause good thoughts, good thoughts bring forth good works, good works carry a man to heaven, ergo good wine carrieth*

a man to heaven». It is more than time that the topic was put on the agenda of Unesco.

But, ignoring Shakespeare (who merely annexed the Latin proverb, vino vendibili hedera non opus est), the reader may ask, «Yes, but studying what?» Pliny indeed answered his own question with «the rough (austerum), the sweet (dulce) and the thin (tenue)». You, my dear Sir, have brought Pliny up to date with a wine for which Augustus himself—can we doubt it?—would have forsworn his Imperial Setinum. The Paladin of Port, no one could wish for a more noble knight-errant, and you will never be alone and palely loitering, so long as you are prepared to «talk about Port» to

your grateful disciple,

*A. George West*

Lisbon, 30th June, 1947.

My dear Mr. George West,

This forlorn world of ours (or part of it, at any rate), is gradually, but surely, discarding all sorts of conventions, social and otherwise, so that I might, in keeping with the trend of international ethics, dodge the traditional reply and confine myself to acknowledging, and thanking you for, your open letter, in a private note. Which, in fact, I did.

However, on second thoughts (not necessarily the best), I decided to acknowledge your learned and most interesting remarks in print, although the task involves a heavy burden for such weak shoulders as mine.

But «Noblesse oblige».

When I asked you to honour my booklet by writing a preface thereto, I merely pursued the beaten track of the unknown author who seeks to conceal his

*insignificance under the protecting shadow of a conspicuous tree.*

*And you, Sir, responded most magnanimously.*

*Judging by the fine pattern of your open letter, I could hardly find a more restful haven in which to shelter my shortcomings in this admirable, and so wealthy, instrument of speech that is the English language.*

*Of the three ways in which you suggest the common reader may treat a preface, he should, to my mind, choose the second, as he will derive no mean satisfaction therefrom when his own appraisal of the work coincides with the introducer's. If and when it does not, clearly he or the preface-writer is at fault.*

*As a reader, I, almost invariably, place the blame on myself, except when the preface-writer's sincerity or clarity of purpose is in doubt, in which case I always follow my own judgment.*

*The first of the ways you indicate seems to me the least commendable, for, even if the preface be only glanced at, the reader can hardly avoid being influenced by it.*

*The third I not only entirely ignore but earnestly hope, as well, that it will not be taken by any of my readers.*

*My one and only chance lies in the second, which — if I may indulge in technical phraseology — will be like relishing a fine Vintage after an indifferent Tawny; — a reversal of the order of drinking or reading can only result in disappointment.*

*In short, I should like — and this is the chief reason for my public acknowledgment of your open letter — to tender you my warmest thanks for your splendid contribution, which has enriched «Let's talk about Port» to an immeasurable extent.*

*As to the relationship of master and disciple, I do wish you could spare the time to give one who is so*

*sorely in need of them some lessons in English and humanistic culture;— to one who is willing enough to admit that, «in a rash and unpremeditated moment», he did, in fact, dare trespass on ground that should be taboo to him, they would be most valuable and welcome.*

*Since, alas, it is too late now to hold back the rotations of the printing press, all I can do is to imitate the pugnacious Roman when he crossed the Rubicon, and exclaim with him: «Alea jacta est»!*

*Yours sincerely,*

*J. Chalanda Pereira*

*Oporto, 15th July, 1947.*

## ILLUSTRATIONS

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- 1 — Map of the Douro Wine-Region
- 2 — The River Douro near the Spanish Frontier
- 3 — Douro Scenery
- 4 — Vine grafting in the Douro
- 5 — Vineyards in the Douro
- 6 — Picking the Grapes
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- 10 — Port Wine Lodge at Vila Nova de Gaia
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## FOREWORD

«Qui ne sait boire ne sait rien»

*Boileau.*

«Un homme qui ne boit que de l'eau  
a um secret à cacher à ses semblables»

*Ch. Baudelaire.*

I was bold enough, some years ago, to commit to paper a series of notes on the Art of Drinking Port, which the Port Wine Institute thought fit to publish in a «deluxe» edition illustrated by Eduardo Malta, that wizard of the pencil, in his magic vein.

Seemingly, the booklet, that with the best of intentions I dared to perpetrate, achieved some little success (which should be mainly attributed to its luxurious presentation) for the directorate of the aforesaid official body solemnly informed me the other day, in what seemed to me a serious mood, that they would welcome an English version of my literary exertions, at the same time expressing the desire that the rendering of the original into the vernacular should be undertaken by me.

Now, I would hardly do justice to myself if, out of modesty, I disclaimed a certain knowledge of the language, which I commenced to pick up in my early 'teens at that fair mansion situated in the heart of «Verdinho», on the other side of the river, on the way down to, and not far

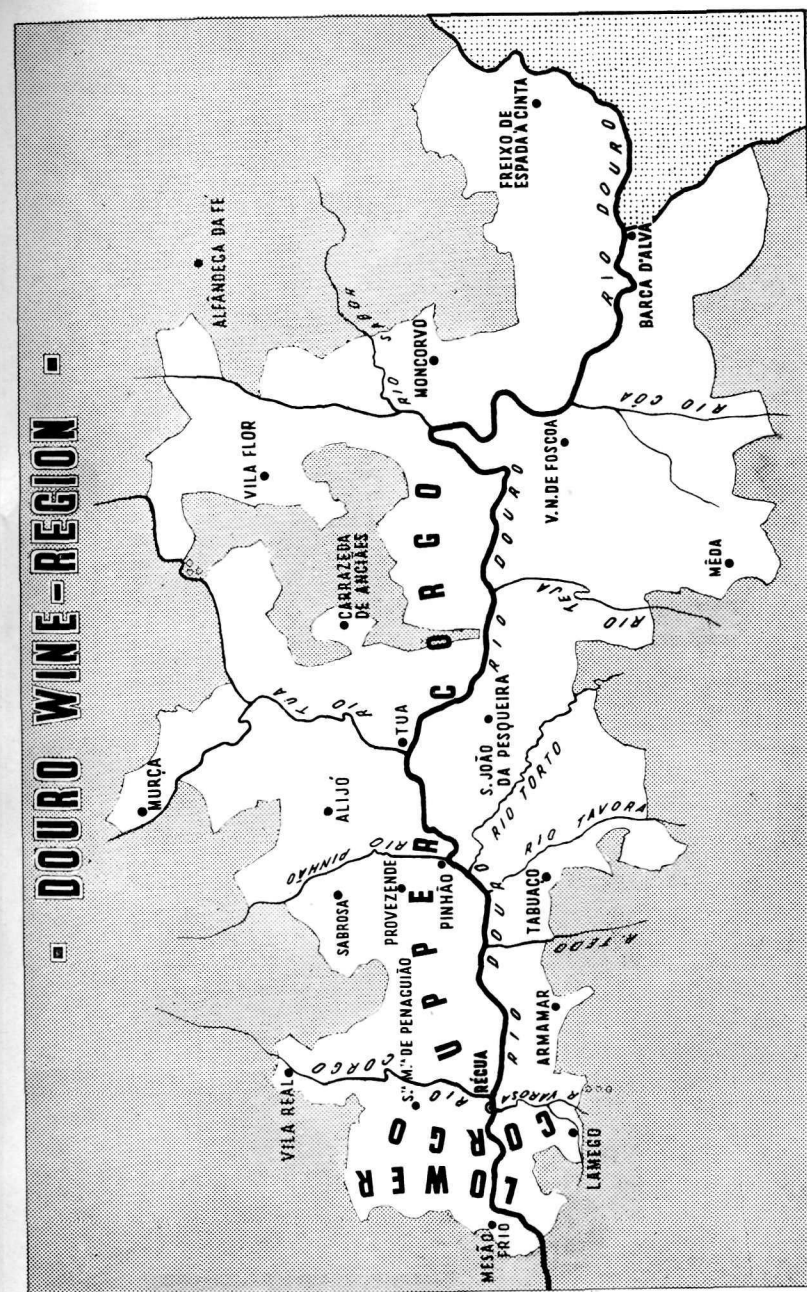
off, the Atlantic—a conspicuous abode at the edge of a wood mostly composed of pine-trees and slender eucalyptus, and encircled by luxuriant shrubberies and gorgeous gardens that struck a refreshing note in the nearby landscape.

The «Verdinho House» was owned at that — alas! — far distant time, by a generous, good-tempered Scotsman (like most of the Scots — and they are more than a few — I have met in many parts of the world), married to a beauty of the land and the proud father of a large progeny. These functions he proficiently combined with the management of a reputable Port-wine house.

As it chanced that my no less prolific parents' abode lay — as it were — at a stone's throw, and in order, I surmise, to relieve the pressure of twelve turbulent children on my good mother's domestic occupations, I was dispatched, together with as many of my brothers and sisters as decency would warrant, to the «Casa do Inglês», to play with the latter's offspring and to master the intricacies of the language. Now, I am afraid I practised a lot more of the former than was good for my learning of the latter, though I always endeavoured (with what result it is not for me to say) to combine the two.

Of the «Casa do Verdinho»'s lavish hospitality, I have kept to this day pleasant memories of substantial tea-parties, with plenty of buttered toast and cakes and an occasional glass of Port (Manager's own)<sup>1</sup> which went

<sup>1</sup> «À-propos» Manager's Port, I should like to record an amusing story which was related to me some years ago, but the authenticity of which I am not prepared to vouch for. During one of his business trips to Oporto, the principal of one of the leading Port wine houses in England was staying with the manager of his local



down my throat like velvet and up to my head like celestial fire.

And this is how I was introduced simultaneously to the charming mysteries of that noble liquor, which is the chief object of the present essay, and to the no less attractive secrets of the English language.

Then, one day, the vagaries of life took me to distant strange lands where my incipient linguistic abilities found a propitious ground for practical development;—and when, years later, the home bells rang for me again, the good old Scotsman was no more and his magnificent property had fallen into the hands of a money-grubber who had done his best, with incredible success, to ruin it. When there was nothing left to be spoiled, he discarded the house, which, after many vicissitudes, capricious Fortune decreed should be occupied by me and my family.

Of the original, neat, internal set-up of the house and external splendour of the grounds, very little, if anything,

branch—a congenial host and a highly experienced authority on Port. The day's labours over, partner and manager sat down to dinner, and when the time arrived for serving the Port (an exhilarating Tawny just off the wood), the partner poured himself out a glass and, after giving it a first nod—as every wine-lover should—admired the glorious colour of the wine against the light, inhaled its bouquet, and took a first sip. His pink cheeks were illumined forthwith by a significant smile which broadened as the glass was emptied and refilled.

The rather prolonged silence (great emotions are always silent) was thus broken:—

Partner — «I say! This is a mighty fine wine»

Manager — «I quite agree, Sir. It's your own wine»

Partner — «I know! But it is jolly sight better than Partner's Port»

Manager — «Of course, it is, Sir. It's Manager's Port».

associated with the Port Trade for a lifetime (though the only benefit — by no means a slight one — I have reaped therefrom has materialized in good wine and frequent wanderings abroad, of both of which I have availed myself as best I could or as circumstances have permitted) and, somehow or other, I was presumptuous enough to assume that I had something to say on the subject.

For some reason or other, the members of the Gastronomic Society were spared the ordeal of listening to my utterance; so, the notes I had collected were put in a drawer and, with the addition of some fresh material, they finally took the form of the original essay in my native language.

The present English version (I purposely avoid the word translation) differs not a little from the original in that I am more concerned with, let us say, the spirit than the letter of the thing. So, far from being a literal rendering of the Portuguese, the present edition (under a different title) has left out some passages of the former work and includes some new matter (taken at random, in some instances, from other minor efforts of mine) more or less clumsily adapted for the English-speaking world.

Furthermore, some of the notions set forth in the Portuguese edition, and more or less faithfully recorded in the present one, though constituting a novelty to most of my countrymen, are likely to be mere platitudes to the vast legion of English wine-lovers. The fact of the matter is that I could hardly refrain from expressing, in a work of this kind, some general views about types of wine, glasses, cellars, decanting methods, the temperature at which wines should be served, and so on.

Having read a few books published in England on the subject of wines, I may have been influenced (beneficially, I hope) by some of them, though I have endeavoured to hold aloof from other people's (however consecrated) opinions and ideas. Mine are purely personal, and the fact of their coinciding with someone else's does not necessarily imply, to my mind, a strong enough motive for my not expounding them. Such a coincidence only serves to prove once again that «Nil novi sub Sole».

\*

From the Portuguese standpoint, I had to consider that, broadly speaking, my countrymen possess a very limited intimate knowledge of the incomparable gift that Mother Nature has bestowed on them in the shape of that «divine beverage» of which Homer spake; and the few who profess to know are, in most cases, biased by prejudices the effects of which are more pernicious than sheer ignorance, as not only are they deprived of the aesthetic pleasure of actually drinking clean, wholesome wine, but (what is worse) their heads are imbued with false notions as to the merits and demerits of the juice of the grape.

I am convinced that in nine cases out of ten, these would-be lovers and connoisseurs of Port drink, and seem to appreciate, vinegar instead. There are exceptions, of course. I have the good fortune of counting some friends in the fast shrinking number of those whom I consider as such, who know how to discriminate a sound, clean wine, in the full possession of its properties, from a decrepit, worn-out beverage, and who thoroughly enjoy the former and invariably reject the latter. And I daresay there are

many other good judges of wine in this country. I trust, however, I am not abusing my countrymen when I declare that they are very much the exception rather than the rule.

There is no greater fallacy in the art of drinking wine than the stupid, deep-rooted idea that the older the wine the better it must be. But let us not anticipate, because this is a topic that deserves a good deal of attention, which will not be denied it in the course of the present essay.

In having my original paper committed to black and white, it was my purpose to try to do away with the afore-said prejudice, and thus to help to educate the countless inhabitants of this country who are eager enough to learn how to drink and appreciate Port.

Now, judging by the number of copies of the original «Arte de beber o Vinho do Porto» that people whom I never heard of keep on demanding (gratuitously) from me, I feel pretty sure that this country, being the birthplace of the finest wine on Earth (with Mr. André Simon's kind permission), would willingly, and rightfully too, occupy the position it is entitled to as a Port-wine-drinking nation if people only knew how to discriminate good from bad wine, irrespective of its age.

On the other hand, the United-Kingdom is the traditional and the leading market for Port — and it is my firm belief that the United States will become sooner or later (and the sooner the better for all concerned) a connoisseur and, therefore, a lover of the Douro wine, too.

In the course of my frequent wanderings in the United States I have always been struck by an outstanding

reality, namely, that Uncle Sam loves and appreciates the best of everything.

Be it in the realm of Art or in the inexhaustible field of science, the Yankee is head and shoulders above the rest of us. It is a commonplace to affirm that in everything modern, America holds a predominant position. However, what many — far too many — do not seem to realise is that, for example, the best classical music in the world, if not composed by, is listened to, and duly appreciated, by Americans; that an alarmingly increasing number of old masters, which used to be the pride of European art-lovers, keep on crossing the Atlantic to adorn the walls of, and regale the visitors to, American museums and private collections; that some of the world-famous ancestral manors and houses have been acquired, pulled down and conveyed to the States where they have been re-erected in suitable surroundings to conform with their style and character — for instance the Cloisters at 698 Fort Washington Avenue, New York, N. Y. — and last but, by no means, least, and without the slightest pretension of exhausting the subject, some of the most refined food and the best wine (I mean «best» and not «most expensive» which, though often associated, are, nevertheless, and pointedly in the matter of food and drink, two entirely different conceptions) could be enjoyed in the States if one were endowed with the discerning faculty and possessed the indispensable wherewithal.

Lots of people who are in the habit of looking at things superficially think — and do not hesitate to say so in public — that the Americans do not care for the amenities of life when these take the form of the so-called pleasures of the table, as their great concern in this world

is to make money. I still remember the verdict of a prominent merchant when I landed, for the first time, in New York, «every American is a dollar-making machine». I ascertained later that the dollars the Americans were turning out of their magic machine, at the cost — be it said in passing — of sheer hard work and countless worries, were destined to alleviate the burden of life in, incidentally, some of the best restaurants of the civilized world.

It was no fault of the Americans if they reluctantly consumed, or refused to consume, the poor, indifferent wine sent to them by profiteers directly after the amendment of the Prohibition Act; — the simple truth is that they are willing enough to pay for the best provided they can get it. I still remember that, back in 1918, I used to drink some excellent Tawny Port (shipped by a noted house in Oporto) which was supplied by a famous firm of grocers, in New York, at \$2.10 a quart. Pretty expensive at the time but worth every cent of the price.

Demonstrate to the Americans what really good wine is; explain to them that Port, for instance, though intrinsically dear, is nevertheless quite accessible to a medium purse; do not let bad stuff get across the Atlantic to discredit the noblest of Nature's creation (the fair sex excepted, of course), and you will soon observe a marked change in their attitude towards it.

Uncle Sam may be a realist who likes to look at things through the light of experience, but he is, doubtless, emotional and art-minded, too.

It is up to us, the offspring of this worn-out, battle-ridden European race to educate the Americans in our

traditional crafts — and wine, be it Portuguese, French, Spanish, Italian or German, is one of the most cherished patrimonies of mankind, which is not likely to succumb to the assault of international Pussyfoot.

It requires a materialist, wholly devoid of all that life holds most sacred, to deprecate a glass of good wine, for there is nothing more inspiring when one is in a happy mood, or more cheering when one's feelings need to be relieved.<sup>1</sup>

Mind you, when I say wine, I mean real, unfaked grape-juice, the genuine produce of vineyards the ascendancy of which has been established for centuries on end, as a result of peculiar agro-climatic conditions which are not, and cannot be, reproduced anywhere else in the world — the noble produce of Mother Earth in co-operation with folks whose art and science are a time-honoured tradition.

For wine-making is more than a science — it is an Art; but no scientific or artistic work can attain perfection which is not elaborated from perfect materials and by perfect artisans.

<sup>1</sup> «As wine greatly elevates and exhilarates depressed spirits, and remarkably cheers old age, it is frequently termed its milk, and all countries, from the earliest antiquity, have prescribed its use as a most sovereign cordial and relief to the fatigues of life. Indeed we learn that Noah was the first that planted a vine, and intoxicated himself with the juice of it. It is often mentioned with applause in the Sacred Text, and by the greatest philosophers as well as physicians, who have all recommended the moderate use of it». A Treatise on the wines of Portugal — Part II — page 19 — by John Croft, S. A. A. member of the Factory at Oporto, and wine-merchant, York — Printed by A. Ward, for J. Todd, York, and sold by R. Baldwin, Pater-Noster-Row, London, 1788.

So, when I say Port wine, I mean the produce of the vineyards located in the area of the Douro region, in the North of Portugal, duly protected by drastic legislation and long consecrated by Nature and by man as the one piece of land on the globe capable of yielding this fascinating liquor.

Likewise, when I say Claret, Burgundy, Champagne and Cognac, I mean the produce of the fair land of France, and I contend that no other country in the world — not even France herself outside the districts where those vinous products are evolved — can achieve anything likely to vie with any of them. The same principle applies to Madeira, Sherry, Barolo or Chianti, or to Hock, Moselle or Tokay.

There is enough «ersatz» in the world as it is.

\*

I understand that some people do not mind swallowing any alcoholic concoction put under their nose provided the stuff tickles their throat, thus giving them a satisfying sensation. Again, some (or should I say the same?) people seem to prefer coarse and badly cooked food to a wholesome, palatable meal. For want of means? Not in the least. It is purely and simply a matter of education. A question of bad taste.

Some people have become so accustomed to eating and drinking what is bad that they would not appreciate what is sound, and good for their health. But educate

those people, bring them up gradually to enjoy what is good and, as often as not, costs no more, and they will curse the days when they had their eyes shut and thus could not relish what is now their daily fare.

Let it be clearly understood that I am not pretending to defend hedonism, a most pernicious doctrine only fit for morbid wealthy idlers and conducive to the most degrading laxity — physical and moral. I do contend, though, that there is nothing more damaging to body and mind than bad stuff in whatever form it may be taken.

\*

I had a friend in London who once told me, when we were cracking, between us, a bottle of that inspiring 1896 Vintage Port — the climax of an excellent dinner, in an oak-panelled room the benign warmth of which was provided by a crackling wood fire: —

«Any time you are not drinking Port is a waste of time».

The 1896 had attained to the peak of perfection and revealed such fascinating charms that I did not wonder at the hyperbole and, in my contented heart and soul, I agreed with my congenial host. If any wine ever deserved to be qualified as sublime that one did. Sublime and elating. It still is if you are lucky enough to strike a good bottle and know how to drink it.

The aforesaid was, I believe, the sincerest (because the most spontaneous) compliment ever paid to Port wine. When I heard it I could not overcome a vague feeling of humiliation as it occurred to me that the type of wine

which had aroused such an encomiastic outburst from my London friend was simply unknown to the vast majority of the inhabitants of the country that produces it.

Now, I am well aware that modern (or shall I say modernistic?) life, with the heavy toll it takes on one's nerves, can hardly be reconciled with the serene, carefree atmosphere required by the full enjoyment of a great wine. But, after all, one cannot, or ought not to, live like a machine, and if one is not to derive legitimate pleasure from the good things that the Lord has created for the enjoyment and delight of mankind, I am afraid life will soon lose all its enchantment.

\*

In the preamble of the Portuguese edition, I submitted that mine was the first work of its kind ever published in this country, and that in its novelty lay its sole merit, if merit there was. I do wish I could make a similar statement as regards my English version. The fact is that a score or two of books or booklets bearing on wines (Port included) have, to my knowledge, seen the light of publicity in the United Kingdom. Therefore, the merit clause, based upon originality, would hardly fit in this foreword, the less so indeed as two or three items in the English bibliography on wine (from the amateur's point of view) deserve the qualification unreservedly.

One in particular, than which no more understanding work, because it is intensely human and unsophisticated, has ever been written in the English language, claims especial attention.

«Notes on a Cellar Book» by the much lamented Professor George Saintsbury is the best composite opus on wine (again from the wine-lover's point of view) ever published anywhere in the world.

The chief charm of «Notes on a Cellar Book» lies in the transparent sincerity (one would feel almost tempted to use the word «naïveté») of the author's appraisal and enjoyment of the multifarious wines that came under his delicate nose and discerning palate. I have alluded to his work as a composite one. So it is. And nobody regrets more deeply than I that the Professor could not dispose of sufficient leisure to devote a little more time and «publisherial» space (to use a word coined by him) to his subject.

The chapter on Port wine (though it is confined to Vintage Port and omits, therefore, other types and styles of the most versatile of wines) strikes me as perfect from every angle; — and his appreciation and criticism of the sundry brands that adorned his cellar, as faultless.

George Saintsbury was not only an accomplished wine-taster but, in my humble opinion, also a major writer of the purest English. No wonder, then, that he has inspired other scribblers (myself included) who have attempted — alas, in vain! — to emulate him.

One of the deceased professor's most brilliant followers, Monsieur André L. Simon, the well-known Franco-British «gourmet», is a delightful writer with a remarkable command of the vernacular. And it is in this particular line that he really shines as a star of the first magnitude in the by no means obscure firmament of the wine bibli-

ography of Great Britain. In this he is really and truly a proselyte of George Saintsbury, than whom nobody ever treated in more charming language the intricate subject of food and drink. Yet what a difference between master and disciple! Austerity and simplicity blended with a liberal and almost emotional dose of sincerity are the master's characteristics in his adorable manner of relating his entertaining experiences of the table. Suppleness of mind, subtlety of humour and candid appreciation of his subject.

Mr. André Simon is, I suspect, too much of an «enfant gâté» with his numerous English friends and admirers, and the result is what it would take a less spoiled temperament to avert, namely, a perceptible spot of affectation in his carefully elaborated utterances about the excellence of the victuals and wines enjoyed by him. Which is a great pity.

I confess to having always entertained a great deal of respect for Mr. Simon's opinions about wine. I have acquired and read most of his books. «The Art of Good Living» I decidedly liked when it came under my notice. It is so well written and so logical. I have read it over and over again. It is the work of an artist in full possession of his craft.

Now, «Tables of Content» is a mere pretext for literature, though at its best.

Mr. André Simon, with his Latin temperament (is blood thicker than... wine?) must be an admirer of Oscar Wilde. If there is no bad book which is well-written, if form is everything and the essence wherefrom it evolves means nothing, then «Tables of Content» is a superlative work of art.

Monsieur Simon is obviously not a lover of Port wine, that absolute king (the «absolute» is mine) of fortified wines as Professor Saintsbury has it in «Notes on a Cellar Book». He is supremely addicted to Claret, Burgundy and Sauterne, and Hock and Champagne and so on, much as he may strive to make us believe that he bestows his favour alike upon all the products of the grape. His appreciation or otherwise of the scanty range of Ports which appear in the «Tables» will tickle (to use the slang expression) every Port-connoisseur and -lover to death!

Just imagine an 1847 Vintage being a «beautiful wine; it was fresher than the younger wine (an 1851) and had greater power, greater vitality».<sup>1</sup> Or again an 1851 Port being «astounding» and with «no sign of decay either in colour, bouquet or body»<sup>2</sup> and «very mellow but quite lively still».<sup>3</sup> Words, words, words...

Monsieur Simon is positively pulling his readers' legs.

Says of the celebrated '47 Vintage Port the most venerated author of «Notes on a Cellar Book»: —

«... and more '47, the latter from when it was about in perfection (say, in 1870) to a date the other day when it was some sixty years old and little but a memory, or at least a suggestion».<sup>4</sup>

Every Port-lover and -connoisseur — Monsieur Simon excepted — will confirm the Professor's verdict. How on

<sup>1</sup> *Tables of Content*, page 163.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, page 96.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, page 96.

<sup>4</sup> *Notes on a Cellar Book*, page 31.

earth Monsieur Simon found it otherwise in A. D. 1931 is, if not a mere pretext for flowers of rhetoric, a mystery to me.

Of the '51 George Saintsbury speaks in the highest and most appropriate terms. But it was many many years ago. '51 is a mere curiosity to-day.

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Maybe the man who wrote that Port has not the breed of Claret has not a very vivid notion of what Port is really like.

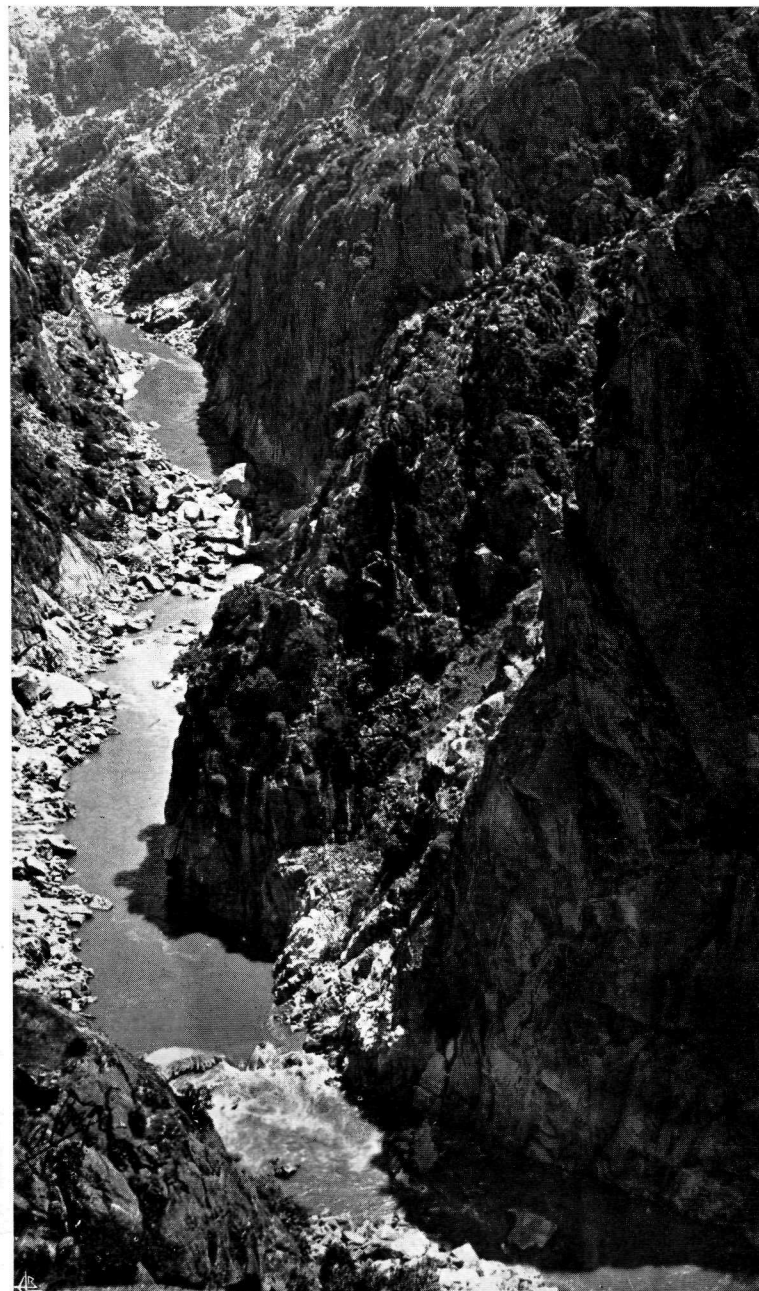
The Club Port served at the Wine Trade Club he describes as «very poor» and, again, in a contemptible manner, «a tawny, washy wine -- so mawkish».<sup>1</sup>

The Club Port of 8 Lloyd's Avenue I have sampled with much «gusto» more than once, thanks to the generous hospitality of some of my London friends, and, unless the wine has changed very much, which I am not inclined to believe, I do wish Monsieur had never drunk worse stuff. He would have become, no doubt, a better judge. What really amuses me is the adjective «tawny»<sup>2</sup> employed in a deprecatory mood in his remarks about the Club Port.

His learned and indefatigable friend Mr. Warner Allen might perhaps enlighten him on the subject, or

<sup>1</sup> *Tables of Content*, page 241.

<sup>2</sup> Truly, Monsieur Simon describes Tawny and Ruby Port, in «The Art of Good Living» (page 36) as «beautiful wines... they possess a most seductive delicacy and the silkiest touch». But, then, he rather vulgarizes the actual sense of the adjective by applying it to most of the wines recorded in his book.



2—THE RIVER DOURO NEAR THE SPANISH FRONTIER

perhaps Monsieur Simon will some day make a trip to Oporto, where his many friends over here will, I feel sure, introduce him to Tawny Port, say, at the Factory or at the British Club; or he may even be lucky enough to be given the opportunity of tasting Manager's Port.

The fact of the matter is that Monsieur Simon seems to be unaware (and it is in this respect that his knowledge of the Douro wine strikes me as somewhat deficient) that Port is a combination—the synthesis, so to speak—of all the most refined wines produced in the world, his beloved (and mine) Claret included. It is this peculiar feature, which Port, of all wines, possesses exclusively, that makes it unique. It incorporates the very best of the best. And in this lies its outstanding and inimitable charm.

«Et... sans rancune».

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Now, to close this prefatory note, one final word of warning may not be amiss. It was exclusively as a devotee of the art of good living, and as an amateur and lover of wine in general and of Port in particular, that I ventured to compose the present essay. I was prompted by no propaganda or mercenary motives. If any hypercritical reader discovers in this or the following papers any matter which, according to his idea, might be construed as an advertisement, let me tell him right now that I am acting, under the circumstances, like the celebrated Monsieur Jourdain... «qui faisait de la prose sans le savoir».

## CHAPTER I

Port is a wine made from grapes grown in the Douro river valley, in a district demarcated by law, wherein certain geological and climatic conditions render its soil the ideal habitat of the vines that produce the most celebrated wine in the world.

This wine-region lies some 40 miles eastward of Oporto, the city in the North of Portugal, at the mouth of the river Douro, which gave its name to Port. Oporto wine — hence, by natural linguistic evolution, Port wine, or in abbreviation, Port, i. e., the name by which is known the nectar from the Douro all the world over.

The domestic name is «Vinho do Porto» or «Vinho Fino do Douro».

The country in the Douro wine-region is exceedingly hilly, and the river flows westward through towering, often abrupt, ravines almost right down to its bar. The soil is mainly composed of friable schist rock, especially so in the best wine-growing localities; — poor soil and very sparingly nurtured by rain, the fall of which in the Port wine district is one of the lowest in Portugal.

Viticulture would be practically impossible but for the system of terraces built on the slopes of the rugged hills. The erection of new terraces and maintenance of old ones, the origin of some of which dates from time immemo-

rial, represent a cyclopean and unrelenting toil for the Douro labourer.

The climate is one of extremes: — very hot in the Summer and bitterly cold in the Winter. Often enough, in some parts of the Douro, the thermometer rises above 40 degrees centigrade (104° Fahrenheit) in the shade, at the peak of Summer, and drops well below freezing point in the Winter. These extreme temperatures play a vital role in the making of good wine. Most of the pests that afflict the plants are destroyed by the cold of the Winter; on the other hand, the heat of the Summer is instrumental in the proper ripening of the grapes. No wonder, then, that Port is regarded, and rightly so, as «bottled sunshine».

The grapes are usually gathered about the last week of September, when they have attained full maturity. The crushing takes place in granite tanks called «lagares», and throughout the process of transformation of the sugar into alcohol, which is closely watched, a given amount of grape brandy is added to the «must» in order to check its fermentation. The degree of sweetness of the wine is thus regulated. If, for instance, a dry, or bone-dry wine, i. e., with a very small percentage of sugar content or none at all is desired, the fermentation of the «must» is allowed to proceed either to the point where the addition of grape brandy stops it or it stops automatically.

The colouring-matter is produced by the action of the alcohol on the pigments contained in the skin of the grape, which are thus dissolved; hence, the more work given to the «must» the deeper the colour of the wine, which, after the final stage, is stored in wooden vats or casks and allowed to rest until Spring. The low temperature of the Winter helps to purge the wine of impurities and matter in suspension, which are precipitated and fall to the bottom of the receptacle.

A further amount of brandy is then added, in order to bring the wine up to the desired strength, which varies, as a rule, between 19 and 21 per cent by volume.

In the Spring the wine is brought from the Douro, in casks, to the lodges at Vila Nova de Gaia, where it commences its long and hazardous career. And I say hazardous on purpose, for wine, being a live organism, is subject to countless accidents, and, therefore, requires the utmost attention and care during its developing process, and, particularly, in its infancy.

Both red and white Port are made in the Douro, the latter being the product of specially selected white grapes, amongst which the «Muscat», which yields a luscious sweet wine known in the Trade by the name of «Muscatel», and much to the liking of the gentle sex.

White and red Port, though grown in the same Douro district, present, nevertheless, distinct traits. The red is richer in acids, has more body, more «fruit» and, therefore, a more marked aroma than the white, which compensates for these shortcomings by a more refined elegance and more mellowness on the palate.

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The production and marketing of Port wine are protected by what may be termed, without exaggeration, the most drastic legislation of its kind in the world. First of all, no Port can be produced outside the region which, owing to its peculiar agro-climatic features, embodies all the conditions rightfully considered as ideal for the breeding of the king of wines. This region, as already stated, is situated on the banks of the river Douro and of some

of its tributaries, and was originally demarcated by the Marquis de Pombal in the middle of the 18th century.

This region yields, of course, wine of various grades. It is divided into two main sections — upper and lower Corgo.<sup>1</sup>

The output of the vines in the upper Corgo is smaller than in the lower, and, therefore, the wine is of a finer structure. As a general principle it can be established that, given similar geological and climatic conditions, the smaller the production the better the wine.

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The production of Port is strictly controlled. The General Council of the Port Wine Institute, composed of the directorate of this official body; the president of the Federation of the Wine-Growers of the Douro, otherwise known as «Casa do Douro» (Douro House), and a delegate of the wine-growers; the president of the Port Wine Shippers Guild; «two individuals of recognized prestige and competence in the economy of Port wine»;<sup>2</sup> and the

<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, Mr. T. Earle Welby, the author of «The Cellar Key», makes an assertion in his book which calls for correction. On a foot-note — page 74 — he states that «some of the best grapes contributing to Port come not from the slopes of the Douro itself, but from those of its neighbour stream, the Corgo, formerly not included in the delineated viticultural area». In the first place, the stream that lent its name to the dividing line between the lower and upper Corgo regions, is a tributary of the river Douro into which it flows just above Regua; secondly, the wine grown on the banks of the Corgo does not rank amongst the Douro's best; and, thirdly, this area, the yield of which is very limited as compared to the rest of the demarcated district, was always included in the delineated wine-region, from the time when it was first charted by the Marquis de Pombal, in the 18th century, down to the present day.

<sup>2</sup> These posts have been filled, ever since the inception of the Council, by two prominent Port shippers.

collector of Customs of the city of Oporto, determines every year, a couple of months prior to the vintage, the quantity of wine to be treated as Port, which is contingent upon the stocks held by farmers and shippers and the quantities disposed of in the previous year. The «Casa do Douro», in turn, specifies the properties or farms («Quintas») where the wine is to be made. Only the best wine of each district is allowed to be turned into Port.

Only the members of the Port Wine Shippers' Guild («Gremio dos Exportadores de Vinho do Porto») are authorized to carry on the business of Port shippers. To become a member of the Guild the following primary conditions must be complied with: —

- a) «to hold and maintain a stock of at least 150,000 litres of Port wine, in properly equipped lodges, which must have the necessary facilities and hygienic conditions, and be situated within the area of the «Entrepasto de Gaia»;
- b) the selling and exporting capacity of each shipper to be determined by the ratio between the quantity of wine made at the vintage and the quantity exported during the preceding year, applied to the stock held on the 30th of June».

The «Entrepasto de Gaia» is constituted by an area, on the south side of the river Douro, just opposite Oporto, where is stored all Port wine for trading purposes, outside the demarcated region in the Douro.

The connecting link between the «Casa do Douro» and the Port Wine Shippers Guild, is the Institute of Port Wine, an official body of economic co-ordination. Its chief functions are: —

- a) to control the stocks at the «Entrepoto», from both the quantity and the quality standpoint;
- b) to supervise all shipments;
- c) to issue certificates of origin.

The control of the stocks at Gaia is exercised by means of current accounts with the shippers, wherein is entered or written off all the wine received from the Douro and sold in the domestic market or shipped abroad.

For the purpose of controlling the quality and physico-chemical composition of the wine, the Institute has at its service a chamber of duly qualified tasters and disposes of up-to-date and well-equipped laboratories. The chamber tastes «blind» samples of all wines received and sold by the shippers; in the laboratories they are analysed and tested. If the wine is not approved by the official tasters, in other words, if the quality thereof does not respond to a minimum standard set up by tradition, or if its organoleptic characteristics, alcoholic strength, sugar content, total and volatile acidity &c. are not within the pattern established by tradition and enforced by law, the wine is rejected, i. e., it cannot be received in the lodges or traded. Wine rejected by the Institute is — in almost every case — distilled. Should the farmer or the shipper not agree with the tasters' verdict, he may have recourse to the «Junta Consultiva», a body composed of 3 reputable tasters from the Trade, whose decision is final. All the tasting — let it be stressed again — is «blind»; in other words, the tasters, whether belonging to the official chamber or to the «Junta», have no idea whatsoever as to whose wine they are appraising. The only identification mark on the bottle is a serial number affixed by the head of the respective department.

Wine sold in the domestic market (and only bottled wine is legally authorized) is duly protected by a «Seal of Guarantee» issued by the Port Wine Institute, exclusively in respect of wine responding to a minimum quality standard, and pasted on or underneath the capsule, on the bottle neck. No Port may be sold in Portugal which does not bear this seal of guarantee, and no Port may be shipped abroad which is not covered by a certificate of origin, which vouches for its genuineness.

## CHAPTER II

It can be safely assumed, I believe, that the act of drinking constitutes a pleasure to most people, in other words, that the absorption of fermented beverages responds to a physiological necessity. But a few — ever rarer — puritans, possessed of false ideologies, and the proselytes of abstruse religious sects, are actual abstainers. Many drink to quench their thirst, others to placate a craving for the excitement produced by liquor, but very few indeed — the devotees of the art of good living — find in drinking an aesthetic pleasure.

To know what, when and how to drink is an art, and a complex one, too, despite its apparent simplicity. Rare are those practised in it.

Ignorance, snobbery, atavism and stupid prejudices are responsible for most of the evils derived from alcoholism. This is a problem the urgency of which does not yield in importance to other long standing social reforms. The day mankind learns how to drink, a stage further will have been attained in the advance towards human perfection. The much advertised, and no less grossly exaggerated, evils of alcoholism are due to public ignorance rather than to the harm caused by liquor itself.

The drinking habit is so inveterate in the human constitution that liquor, in the restricted proportions contained in light beverages, such as wine and beer — to cite but two of the most popular drinks in the world — cannot

be considered — as international pussy-footism proclaims — pernicious to bodily and mental health. Furthermore, it has been scientifically ascertained that alcohol, in its current mild form, is a precious food and even indispensable to a healthy life.

Therefore, it is not alcohol, in its manifold varieties, that is in question, but, in ever-increasing measure, the mode and measure of its ingestion. In this particular, the present day world furnishes the most alarming symptoms of degeneracy.

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According to Léon Daudet, the cocktail is «an epilepsy in a goblet, an iced perversion of the palate» — to me, it is a jazz-band of beverages that blend exactly in the same manner as the musical notes of that infernal «charivari».

The cocktail was invented by the devil, who is said to be an astute psychologist. The Evil One took advantage of the mentality created by the first world war to throw the cocktail anathema on mankind, thus completing its toil of destruction.

In order the better to accomplish his demoniac designs, the Evil Spirit resorted to an extremely clever trick — he assumed the disguise of Fashion, the omnipotent matron that rules over the destinies of humanity. And Fashion having decreed that the cocktail was a swell habit, the world and his wife started imbibing the most deleterious beverage that could ever be devised by malignant brains.

The cocktail is but a turmoil of potent, intoxicating ingredients which, when swallowed on an empty stomach, acts like a violent corrosive of the mucose and ruins alike

the tissues and the intellectual enjoyment afforded by liquor in its noblest forms.

Taken separately, there is nothing to be said against the components of the liquid aberration implanted by a stupid and snobbish Fashion. But I challenge any one with a rudimentary notion of the art of good living not to condemn the intoxicating concoction dictated by Fashion and meekly accepted by men and women alike, especially the latter.<sup>1</sup>

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As an appetizer, the cocktail is sheer nonsense. Instead of generously stimulating the gastric juices, it neutralizes the action of the glands thus paralyzing their beneficial functions. So, far from being an appetizer, the cocktail is quite the reverse — an appetite-killer. It is so violent in its composition, and so corrosive of the inner parts of the human body, that its ingestion is tantamount to an almost suicidal practice.

As an after-dinner beverage, the cocktail might perhaps be tolerable from a physiological point of view, for it would fall on the well-protected walls of a well-filled stomach. But, who is going to substitute the noble wines, brandies and liqueurs for an anodyne concoction unless Fashion, the most despotic of tyrants, so determines?

<sup>1</sup> Drinks served at so-called cocktail-parties include, as likely as not, wine and/or wine-cups, and, occasionally, good old Scotch — a favourite with most people — which are consumed in lieu of the concoctions after which such parties are named. The French have «Vin d'Honneur» and the Portuguese, «Porto de Honra», which are, both of them, much more to the point. Funnily enough, the Portuguese also call social gatherings where snacks are served together with liquor, «Copo d'Agua» (literally — glass of water).

Vermouth, or, better still, dry Sherry, Madeira Sercial or dry Port, taken before a meal, excite the tasting glands with their subtle esters and thus prepare the stomach for the reception and assimilation of food as no other alcoholic stimulant does. Port is an excellent appetizer.

I still keep in my memory an 1870 refreshed Port, on the dry side, served, not long ago, as an appetizer at a diplomatic banquet, which was a perfect marvel. Though born in 1870 (one of the great pre-*phylloxera* years in the Douro) and, therefore, on the downward trend, because it had passed the zenith of perfection, it had, through a judicious blend with a younger wine of the same breed and character, recovered its decaying vigour and reacquired that «ensemble» of well-balanced vinous virtues that make a wine worth drinking and dying for.

To be quite candid — I regaled myself with it and drank practically nothing else throughout the repast, although there were some other fine wines served and despite my being quite conscious that I was thus infringing one of the basic rules of the art of good living. Nobody would or could give me the assurance that my lips would touch such a nectar again, and I wanted to commit to the deepest recesses of my memory the ineffable impression and aesthetic sensation given by such a wine. It was too good for words!

For the benefit of humanity, the cocktail habit is slowly but surely declining in its vogue, and thank goodness for that. Truly, the world tolerates the tyranny of Fashion conditionally upon its stimulating fresh novelties all the time; but, in this particular, the cocktail has already exhausted the morbid and not too fertile imagination of barmen and suchlike profiteers from human gullibility and snobbery.

In the great, civilized, European centres the appetizer, which is a rational and, as such, an intuitive social

convention, is resuming the vinous form. In some countries, Sherry reigns supreme «*par droit de conquête*»; in others, and chiefly in France, Port holds the crown, and in the northern countries and particularly in Sweden, the sceptre belongs to Madeira. A vinous conception that conforms with our physiological constitution. An olympic trinity — Port, Madeira and Sherry. The three finest fortified wines in the world, each, or course, within its province.

The appetizer-drinking practice has still not grown deep roots in this country, which is a pity and represents no mean loss to the extensive wine-producing industry of the land, which presents, year in year out, an ever-increasing surplus of vinous products the disposal of which is the nightmare of farmers and government circles alike.

Primarily a wine-producing country, the birthplace of the two finest fortified wines on Earth, to say nothing of the wide variety of table-wines which, if and when properly made and properly looked after, vie with the most celebrated ones, Portugal offers indeed the sad spectacle of the poorest consumer of her own riches. The fact is that the consumption of wine «*per capita*» in Portugal is below the average attributed to other European wine-producing countries, such as France, Italy and Spain, in descending order; something like 96 litres per head of population, according to recent statistics.

Though rather sceptical as to the accuracy of this figure, which I consider on the low side, it cannot be denied that there is ample room in this country for a larger consumption of the fermented juice of the grape, the more so because the Portuguese are very little addicted to other alcoholic beverages, including beer, the consumption of which, outside the big populational centres, is practically nil.

The lack of interest in wine in this country should be attributed to psychological motives, the Portuguese being, as a rule, not only sober by temperament but thrifty by instinct.

Economic conditions, however, are fast improving by virtue of far-reaching measures adopted by the authorities to foster the agricultural and industrial development of the country, and to promote the welfare of the working classes, a state of affairs which will, no doubt, have a favourable reaction on domestic viticulture.



3—DOURO SCENERY

### CHAPTER III

Port wine has been sung in so many and such varied keys that it would be ridiculous to claim the ability to add to its world-wide reputation. A sublime conception of Olympus («optima dona deorum»), it can be repeated of it with propriety that the gods might create, if they chose, a better wine, but they have not yet cared to do so. And Latin being «de rigueur» when mythological language is employed, I will say that no other wine under the Sun so deserves the proud legend boasted by a third growth Claret, namely, «Regum mensis arisque deorum» — wine for the tables of kings and altars of gods, — which is far from implying that it is not accessible to us, sinful mortals.

Portuguese bibliography on Port wine is exceedingly scanty and poor. We leave it, as a rule, to others to glorify its unique attractions. Out of modesty? Not in the least. Ignorance of our own riches, that is what it comes to.

A by no means small library could be collected in England out of the matter printed about wines in general, not to mention France, which, in addition to an extensive, diversified and extremely interesting bibliography on wine, has inspired a rich folk-lore on the same subject. Much as it may hurt our national feelings, the truth of the matter is that Port is regarded in England, and not without reason,

as the Englishman's wine because, as George Saintsbury has it in «Notes on a Cellar Book» (page 45):

«it strengthens while it gladdens as no other wine can do; and there is something about it which must have been created in pre-established harmony with the best English character.»

It is drunk in England in an infinitely larger measure and — «poenitet nos» — on the whole, of a higher quality than in the country of origin.

Climatic conditions prevailing in England and in Portugal are apt to account, to a certain extent, for the marked favour enjoyed by Port in the former country and the only too apparent indifference of the latter. Cold weather is best suited, no doubt, for the enjoyment of alcoholic beverages, and Portugal, notwithstanding the inconstancy of her climate, can hardly be regarded as a cold country, though the winter, especially in the northern districts, has very little, if any, of the mildness attributed to it on Parnassus. Temperatures below freezing and snowfalls — the ideal conditions for the relish of a cheering-up wine — are not infrequent; — but such an inducement does not seem to make an irresistible appeal to the vast majority of my countrymen, for the figures displayed by official statistics about the consumption of Port in this country, though revealing, thanks to the propaganda undertaken by the Port Wine Institute and the Trade, a substantial increase over pre-war years, are still very far from denoting a real interest in the wine.

As a striking contrast to the slight interest shown by Portuguese in their major wine, the case of Spain, the geographical position of which affords her climatic conditions, in a considerable part of her territory, similar to

our own, may serve as an object lesson. Andalucia, in southern Spain, is the birthplace of Sherry, also a fortified wine the alcoholic strength of which does not differ, in a marked manner, from that of Port; yet, the Sherry-drinking habit is so deeply rooted in the Spaniards that most of the wine produced is jealously kept in the country for the enjoyment and delight of its inhabitants.

The case of Norway, a very thinly populated country, where the drinking of liquor is stimulated by extremely adverse climatic conditions, may also illustrate the preference given to Port. The population of that Scandinavian nation is somewhat less than a half of that of Portugal; — notwithstanding, the Norwegians drink more than twice as much Port as the Portuguese,<sup>1</sup> and of excellent quality, too, a fact which — I am bound to say — does not redound to our credit.

To be sure, Port wine, indeed, all wines, fortified or otherwise, have a common foe in the so-called liberal classes, which, despite Pasteur's verdict, backed by the tremendous weight of his authority, to the effect that wine is the most wholesome of all beverages, are, nevertheless, strongly biased against alcohol, even in its most diluted variety.

There are exceptions, of course — many and valuable — which only tend to confirm the rule. As a matter of routine, physicians not only do not prescribe alcohol to their patients, but formally forbid its moderate use by ailing persons who are accustomed to it, although the sudden interruption of a habit seems to react most prejudicially on the human constitution.

All of us who were born in the past century, have already witnessed so many changes in the healing art,

<sup>1</sup> The consumption of Port in Norway is even higher «per capita» than in England — in point of fact, it is the highest in the world.

that we should not be unduly surprised if the medical profession in general decided to admit the therapeutical properties of wine. Which, let it be said in passing, would hardly represent an innovation.

A dear friend of mine, who used to make lengthy stays in Switzerland, always had with him a few bottles of Port for his own and his friends' enjoyment. On one occasion, he got on the sick-list with some intestinal trouble, and sent for one of the best known specialists in Geneva, who greatly surprised him by prescribing, as a complement to some medicine, a dose of old Cognac Brandy. Diffidently, my friend, not believing his ears, inquired: «Real Cognac Brandy?» «Certainly», confirmed Aesculapius, «it will be very helpful as a disinfectant». «Couldn't I have Port instead? I am a wine-merchant and have always in hand a bottle or two of the right stuff». «May I have a look at it?», asked the doctor.

Well, the doctor tasted the wine like one who knows, and commented: «Yes, *this* will be better than Cognac».

When my friend came back to Oporto, I happened to be suffering from similar trouble, and felt not a little dejected by the strict diet my doctor had subjected me to. I listened to my friend's story and decided thereupon to act on my own. The result was as rapid as it was beneficial. I very soon recovered from an ailment that had afflicted me for over a month. For the sake of convenience, I was careful enough to conceal from my doctor the true nature of the *medicine* I had taken to achieve such a speedy recovery, which he — bless him! — attributed to the drugs he had prescribed.

In my humble opinion, there is nothing more harmful to mind and body than prejudices or pre-conceived ideas, whatever shape they may assume. Besides, it is not only

in the realm of dress or personal appearance that Fashion reigns supreme.<sup>1</sup>

Some ticklish person may ask: «How about a vinous product sold nearly all over the civilized world under the imposing designation of Invalid-Port?» Oh! Yes, of course, there is Invalid-Port which, as the name implies, is supposed to be a restorative of sorts much to the liking of ailing or anaemic persons.

Now, what is Invalid-Port? It is, in most cases, a luscious wine which purports to act and, like all sound wine, does act, as a tonic. Lots of people drink it and feel much the better for it.

Many people, however, do not regard Invalid-Port seriously. They take it to be one of the many tricks resorted to by the Trade to promote the consumption of wine. Notwithstanding, other folks seem to think differently — at least in this country, judging by the popularity enjoyed, some years ago, by a «Nutritious-Beef-Wine» (sic) which made the fortune of its inventor — an apothecary.

Talking of wine as a tonic (Petronius, the Brummel and one of the most brilliant personalities of ancient Rome, described it thus: «*Vinum vita est*»), reminds me of my early youth when my father (at the time, a modest wine-merchant) allowed us, the kiddies, at family parties, to dip our forefinger in his Port glass and to sip it, for the sake — he used to say — of our health. We were much too young to be permitted to drink and enjoy Port like grown-ups, so we had to resort to the finger-dipping-and-sipping practice, which made us smack our lips, all the same.

<sup>1</sup> «... à ce que la médecine est dirigée par la mode». Alexis Carrel — «L'homme, cet inconnu» — Page 217.

It is my full conviction that the animosity displayed by many persons towards wine would vanish if only they had a chance of making the acquaintance of clean, sound wine, and did not ascribe to it the ill effects that, in most cases, are due to other causes.

In this connection, another story may not be amiss.

A distinguished physician and friend of mine, who has already undertaken the last voyage, was, a good many years ago, medical attendant to my family. He suffered — so he used to say — from a chronic ailment, and could not, for the precious life of him, bear Port wine being even mentioned in his presence.

In the first visits that he paid to my family in the exercise of his professional functions, he always rejected, with words of contempt, the glass of wine which, out of courtesy, was offered to him on leaving the house. He simply cursed it. I confess that, on a given occasion, faced with a recrudescence of the doctor's almost impertinent outburst, I nearly reached breaking-point, and, to relieve the pressure, (my doctor-friend was a highly cultured man very much addicted to literary composition) I embarked upon the praise of my wine with such enthusiasm and conviction, and employed so eloquent a language («O tempora, o mores!») that, to my great astonishment, I managed to induce him to change his mind and sample a bottle that I had purposely opened for him.

Well, he tasted the wine... and seemed to like it, for, after smacking his lips, he repeated the dose and commented: «to the devil with» (and here he gave his ailment a complicated name which sounded like Greek). The next day, when he returned to the house to administer his professional care to one of my family, he drank again the wine which — he honestly admitted — had done him no harm at all. He didn't know how to make it out. The

fact of the matter was — said he — that his suffering was usually aggravated when he drank Port. However, the wine drunk the previous day, far from hurting him, had given him the relieving impression of an improvement in his condition.

And he never came to the house again that he did not accept the traditional glass of wine.

Then, one day, I asked my doctor friend to let me have a bottle of the «rare jewel» that he had inherited from his ancestors (my medical friend hailed from the Douro) which so injured his health when he had to touch it at festive family parties, and I was not surprised to find that the «rare jewel» contained a percentage of volatile acids much above the limit established by custom and allowed by law. In other words, my friend was accustomed to drinking vinegar instead of wine. As soon as he began to drink the latter, he could not but persuade himself that the wine, far from affecting his viscera, rather stimulated their action, and thenceforth he drank everyday a glass of the Port I gave him in exchange for the bottle of vinegar.

To my doctor friend, as to a legion of many others like him, his wine *had* to be good because it was *very old*. Why, he remembered that very wine at his father's when he was about so big, and that was many many years ago.

To the vast majority of the so-called wine-lovers in this country, the quality of a wine is expressed in terms of its age — a most fallible concept, for there is an age limit to all living organisms, wine included, beyond which decay supervenes. Ripe old age and senility are two entirely different things.

Old age does not, therefore, correspond in wine to a general indication of quality. Some wines accommodate themselves easily enough to a long existence; others begin to decline soon after their birth. It is all a question

of the nature of the soil, of the kind of the wine, the atmospheric conditions prevalent throughout the year, the physico-chemical composition of the wine (the longevity of a given wine depends on the perfect balance of its sundry elements), to sum up, the life of a wine depends upon a thousand and one factors about the effects of which it is neither safe nor prudent to establish any hard and fast rules.

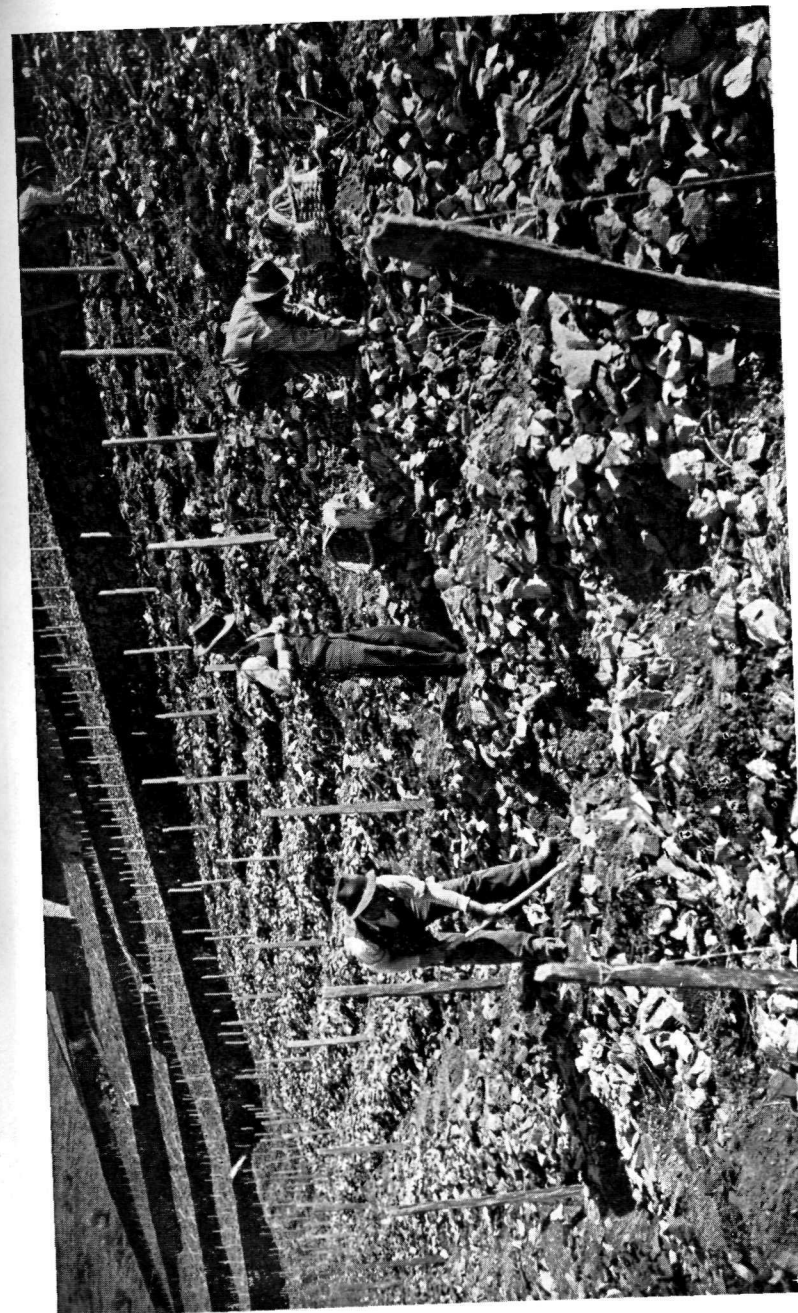
An 1875 Claret may still be — to this day — a great wine, in full possession of its insuperable beauty. The wine produced in the very same «château» 20 or 30 years later, may be but a fossilised relic.

Champagne lasts, as a rule, 12 to 15 years, and comes of age when it is, say, 8 or 10 years old. Yet, I keep in my mind the delightful experience of an «Irroy» born in 1911 which, 18 years later, displayed its crispness with remarkable endurance.

A «Salon» (Nature) of that marvellous 1921 Vintage (also an «annus mirabilis» for Champagne) served, some years ago, in magnums at a banquet of the «Club des Cent» held in Paris to celebrate the first centenary of the passing away of the great «Cordon Bleu» and prolific writer that was Antonin Carême, left on my palate and memory the never to be forgotten impression that rarely, if ever, has the chalky soil of Champagne or the craft of man attained to such pinnacles of perfection.

Burgundies there are that, soon after their birth, sink, almost without transition, into a precocious decrepitude; on the other hand, it has been my privilege to enjoy, two and more score years after its advent, wine of the «Côte d'Or» the vitality of which would bring shame on an adolescent.

The process of evolution of wine and, therefore, its duration, depends upon its structure. This oenologic



4 — VINE GRAFTING IN THE DOURO

principle applies to all wine, without distinction. Truly, Port, without attaining the age of a «Bual» or «Sercial»,<sup>1</sup> is, nevertheless, by nature, one of the most robust and long-lived of wines. To assume, however, that the older the wine the better it must be, amounts to indulging in the most fallacious of prejudices.

If the wine is not so constituted as to benefit by the action of time, it will be but jeopardized by age. To put it in plainer language: bad wine not only does not improve with age, but it gets worse as years go by. Crooked wine cannot be straightened.

Age does not set right what is bad, it improves what is good. The maturing process is brought about by the oxydization of the sundry acids contained in the wine. In contact with oxygen, which the wine easily assimilates, certain acids combine with alcohol in the formation of esters.

This reaction is responsible for definite physical alterations in the structure of the wine — hence, the precipitation of the colouring-matter. The colour of the wine gradually drops its intensity until it reaches, in wood-matured wine, that dazzling topaz hue, which is the sign of a superlative Tawny Port.

Nothing could be further from my scope than to tackle the complex problem of the ageing of wine from a physico-chemical standpoint. The famous scientific studies of Pasteur (and I may be permitted, no doubt, to mention as well the researches of some eminent Portuguese oenologists such as Ferreira da Silva and António

<sup>1</sup> Madeira is the longest-lived wine, apart from «Tokay», which is more of a cordial than anything else. Some years ago, at the Wine Trade Club, in London, two Madeiras, 130 and 140 years old, were served, which, in the opinion of those who sampled them, were still quite drinkable.

Augusto de Aguiar, also the most interesting investigations recently carried out by the Technical Services of the Port Wine Institute<sup>1</sup> are too well-known for me to expatiate on a subject on which — to say the least — I am hardly competent, and which would scarcely be reconcilable with my present intentions.

Time acts on wine, as it were, in the same manner as it does on the human body. It serves to foster its latent qualities, stimulating its progress in the scale of perfection, but not to correcting its defects.

Truly, science occasionally succeeds in amending, both in individuals and wine, natural defects. But it is no less true that both in the human species and in the juice of the grape the defect remains, though in a disguised form.

The absurd notion, ingrained in so many people's mind, that wine *always* improves with age should, therefore, be dismissed.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Anais do Instituto do Vinho do Porto*.

## CHAPTER IV

The Douro nectar asserts itself by the excellence of its attributes — the matchless distinction of its bouquet and flavour, which make it the finest wine in the world. When the benign action of time enhances its unique virtues, Port attains such heights of perfection that, in a moment of exaggerated enthusiasm, one of its addicts from the British Isles once exclaimed: — «Port is the only wine — there are other beverages». Rather a strange utterance from English lips, usually phlegmatic and self-restrained, but quite conceivable to all those who have enjoyed the supreme ecstasy of tasting one of the great Douro wines.

It goes without saying that there are other wines besides Port, and, thank goodness, plenty of them, too. But I do think that only Port wine could have inspired such an enthusiastic outburst.

It is a matter for regret that Port wine has not, so far, aroused the interest of Portuguese men of letters, notwithstanding their fertile imagination served by a wealthy language, which, in poetry in particular, displays the most opulent attire.

But for a sparse essay or two, Port has not yet inspired the Portuguese poetical vein, and even the domestic folk-lore, otherwise so rich and expressive, is

very poor on the subject of wine, in contrast with the dithyrambs intoned to it in other lands.

How many sublime poems, in prose and in verse, could not Port wine inspire to our sanguine temperament if our writers cared to render it the tribute it so fully deserves?<sup>1</sup>

Philosophers and poets, the most refined geniuses, from the darkest ages to modern times, including the most brilliant Greek and Latin classical authors, have praised wine in the most encomiastic terms.

George Saintsbury, to whom I have already made so many references, has dedicated to Port wine a chapter or two of imperishable beauty. He passed away not long ago, after celebrating his 80th birthday, despite his love for wine, of which he consumed not a little, or, shall I say, for this very reason? The Saintsbury Club, created in London under his aegis, where the Art of Good Living is practised in all its purity, represents a well-deserved homage to a great man who succeeded in harmonizing his privileged talent with the ineffable pleasures of a refined table and a picked cellar.

Commenting upon the last bottles of 1870 and 1873 Vintage Ports, the distinguished Epicurean confesses, in one of the most interesting passages of his book, that were it not for spoiling the wine, he would have drunk it mingled with tears.

No Latin could have put it in a more expressive manner.

<sup>1</sup> «Good poems come from flavoury wine, for poetry begs its inspiration from the wine».

\*

Reverting to the question of age in Port wine, I frankly admit that I fully share Professor Saintsbury's opinion to the effect that wine over 40 or 50 years old had better be drunk, lest it should be past its best.

In other words, and putting aside the exceptions which only serve to prove the rule, most wine has lost part of its stamina after an existence of half-a-century.

Some people put the age limit of wine at 30 years, which is definitely too short a span of life for most well-balanced products of the grape.

Barham, the English humourist of the last century, was still more conservative when he wrote the often quoted verses:

«And I question if keeping it does it much good  
After 10 years in bottle and 10 in the wood.»

«Est modus in rebus». It is obvious that the famous humourist appreciated young, vigorous wine, i. e., before it had attained its prime, for Vintage Port (and particularly the pre-phylloxera wine enjoyed by Barham) does not, as a rule, reach the summit of perfection in under 30 or more years.

If age is not, as already suggested, a guarantee of quality, the fact remains that the process of evolution of Port claims a more or less prolonged lapse of time, which can be expressed in terms of divers factors, such as alcoholic strength, consistency of body, percentage of acids and so forth.

## CHAPTER V

The quintessence of the liquorous wine grown on the slopes of the Douro hills is Vintage Port. This is the type of wine that made the reputation of Port in the United Kingdom. It is a wine in a class by itself, the organoleptic characteristics of which are entirely different from those of the other wines consumed in this country.

The Douro valley was selected by the gods for the birthplace of this, the king of wines. Its schistous and poor soil nourishes, and the Sun caresses, the resplendent fruit which yields the world's renowned ambrosia.

Such poor soil (ill-spread over terraces which the inclemency of the weather constantly strips and the hand of man, in a gigantic effort, incessantly renews) concentrates in the humus that feeds the vine, as though on it were lavished all its motherly love. And the food being hardly sufficient for the nourishment of numerous shoots, only a few bunches of grapes are nurtured in each plant. Few bunches but sound and perfect, which is preferable to a larger production the quality of which would be jeopardized by abundance.

Grapes bred by the noblest vines,<sup>1</sup> each bunch is an apotheosis of Sun and gold.

<sup>1</sup> The older the vine the smaller the yield. Only after 15 or 20 years do the noblest stocks begin to produce their best fruit.

Years occur in which Nature, always fickle in her designs, co-operates with Mother Earth and grants the vine ideal flowering, growing and ripening conditions; she supplies it with such a complex of climatic factors as will cause the grapes to attain the acme of perfection. Throughout vintage time, the Douro region is blessed with the right temperature for the labour of the «saccharomices», the diligent workers that convert grape-sugar into alcohol, carbonic acid gas, glycerine and other products such as acids, aldehydes and azotized matter which, though appearing in a small percentage, are actually instrumental in the making of a high grade wine.

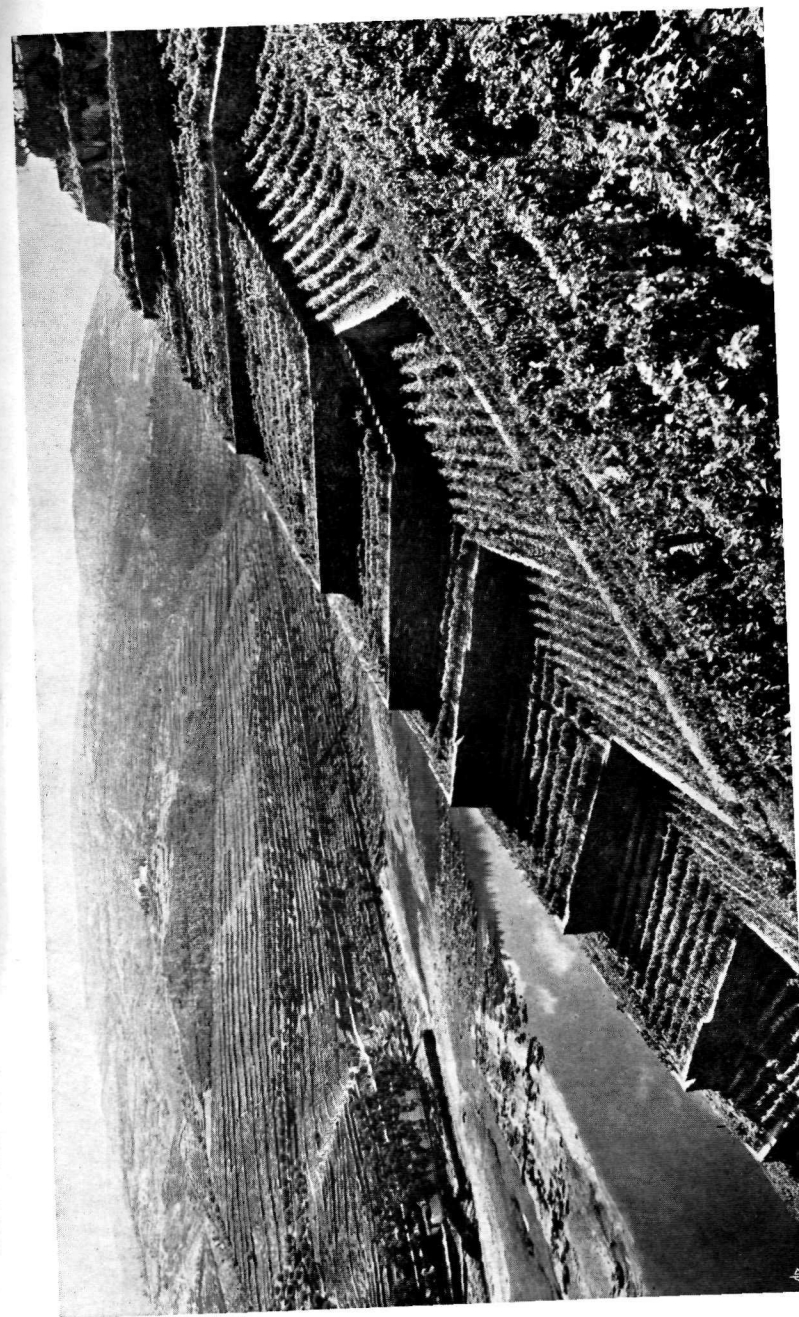
In such years, the Douro produces the raw material for Vintage Port.

Overflowing with colouring matter, exuberant in body, rich in acids, vintage wine does not bear any comparison, nor does it admit of any blending, in its pride of grandee, with any other vinous products of less category.

Early in the Spring, it is brought from the steep hills of the Douro down to the lodges in Gaia, where the wine-shipper closely watches with affectionate concern the first phase of its evolution; and, it after the always delicate childhood stage, the wine responds to the expectations of its producer, it is shipped (as a rule, two years after birth) to the United Kingdom, where it is bottled forthwith in order to be submitted to the slow maturing process in the seclusion of adequate cellars.

Here you have, in rough language, what Vintage Port is—the quintessence of the liquorous wine of the Douro valley.

More than one gentleman of fair Albion, when sipping, in ecstasy, this divine liquor, whispers in a grateful mood: «Blessed be the fair land of Portugal that bred such a noble wine!»



5—VINEYARDS IN THE DOURO

In its embryonic stage, vintage wine, saturated with colouring matter, is rough, hard, almost unpleasant. All its components are disparagingly shuffled like the colours on a painter's palette. But Father Time, that incomparable alchemist, tirelessly proceeds with his magic toil—he causes alcohols and acids to react among themselves, combines them, harmonizes them in such an accomplished manner as to render them as soft as the softest ermine.

In olden times, before the appearance of the phylloxera scourge which devastated the European vineyards, vintage wine possessed more character and its maturing was slower and more laborious. The wine boasted more body, had, so to speak, more soul, more «guts». And it lived longer. Such were the Vintages of the famous years of 1834, 1847, 1851, 1863, 1870 and 1873.

The introduction of the American stock, which has the power to withstand the murderous activities of «*phylloxera vastatrix*», enfeebled the wine and deprived it of some of its outstanding properties. As from the last quarter of the 19th century, the wine naturally resented the intromission of the alien agent, and, sacrificing its span of life, accelerated the ripening process.

To be sure, Vintage Port still maintains that elegance of the «*ancien régime*» that distinguishes it from all other wines; it lacks, however, the stamina to aspire to the longevity of its ancestors. These required, as a rule, a preliminary storage of 3 to 4 years in the cask, to be tamed down, i. e., before being bottled. The wine of to-day at the end of a 3-year contact with the wood, cannot stand it any longer and has to retire humbly to its last abode. Hence, the almost general practice of confining Vintage Port to the bottle about two years after its birth, i. e., at a time when the wine, at the peak of its vitality, is likely to

display a greater power of endurance in the glass receptacle.

The American stock is characterized by a tremendous vitality, which keeps the plant in the youthful stage and, therefore, in large production,<sup>1</sup> for a number of years, and the quality of the wine is thus affected. Only at the end of 10 or 15 years does this exuberance of life begin to subside before the action of time, when the yield of the plant gradually declines. Paradoxically enough, the younger and the more vigorous the vine, the less refined and shorter-lived the wine, which reaches its greatest vitality precisely when the plant has spent away most of its own.

Numerous and varied are the stocks that contribute towards the making of Port, and they are, generally, selected to suit the agro-climatic conditions of the locality where the wine is grown. Amongst them, one could pick out the following as the inbreeders of the most refined wine in the Douro, namely :

BASTARDO, MALVASIA PRETA, MOURISCO TINTO, SOUSÃO, TINTA AMARELA, TINTA CARVALHA, TINTA FRANCISCA, TINTO CÃO, TINTA RORIZ, TOURIGA, GOUVEIO, MALVASIA FINA, MOSCATEL ROXO and RABIGATO.

Most, if not all, of the above stocks have been transplanted to other wine-growing lands of the world, including North and South America, by jealous though gullible farmers and merchants who assumed that the

<sup>1</sup> Obviously, agro-climatic conditions have a decisive influence on the output of the vine.

same kind of vine would produce an identical wine, irrespective of soil and climate. The fact is that such stocks as above described, and many others of European extraction, when transplanted to strange lands, bitterly resent the change and refuse to yield their best fruit. The result is an indifferent stuff which does not bear the slightest resemblance to the noble wine grown in the vine's natural habitat.

*«Natura non facit saltus».*

## CHAPTER VI

Vintage Port is a wine of many peculiarities. It dislikes hot climates. It is capricious and ungrateful. Born at the cost of sheer hard labour and countless pains, it repudiates the land of its birth. Engendered by the heat of the Sun and the Earth, it abjures it and prefers, in its retreat, the colder climate of the northern regions. The Sun that bred it is its enemy. The wine loathes it to the extent of becoming bad-tempered, heavy, quasi-aggressive, in its presence. Vintage Port adores septentrional latitudes. According to an English «dictum», it claims snow on the fields and a cheerful fire on the hearth to display all its charms; being, however, a proud, selfish wine, it only gives itself entirely to its devotees, in the supreme wealth of its esters, in the suave atmosphere of a room with logs ablaze in the chimney-place.

The caprice is justified. Vintage Port prides itself on an alcoholic strength above that of its next-of-kin of lower hierarchy. It often reaches 23 percent of alcohol by volume, when its robustness not only consents to but in addition appreciates such a strength.

All the same, in the Winter, Vintage Port can be, and is, enjoyed in this country. From December to early Spring, one can find it, in our midst, if not entirely

happy, at least in a well-disposed mood. And often enough have I appreciated and continue to appreciate it under such conditions.

I shall refer later to the care required by it. For the moment, I only wish to call back to mind and palate an 1896, bottled in 1898, matured in this country, which, in my humble opinion, ranks amongst the best produced in the Douro.

The most celebrated Vintages in the last 50 years or so were those of the years 1887, 1890, 1896, 1900, 1904, 1908, 1912, 1917, 1920, 1922 and 1927.

Of recent Vintages, 1934 and 1935 are two outstanding specimens. There was, though, at the time of shipping, a great deal of controversy as to the relative merits of these wines, the echo of which has not died out yet. Some shippers contended that one was better than the other. Seldom does the Douro yield two consecutive Vintages of superlative quality, and this exceptional occurrence was contributory, I daresay, to the discrepancy of opinions. In England, 1935 was mostly the winner, but, to some good judges' mind, 1934 was just as fine, if not finer. To me, they are both equally good.

In 1942 and 1945, some very good wines were also made, but they were not shipped, for obvious reasons. 1945, in particular, was exceptionally fine.

It is a matter of routine, in an essay about wine, for the writer to dilate upon the vintages most to his liking and I do not propose to evade the rule. The Vintages I liked, and like, best were, and are, 1890, 1896, 1900, 1904, 1908, 1912 and 1917. The three vintages that appealed most to George Saintsbury, the «sacerdos-magnus» of vinic liturgy, were 1851, 1870 and 1890.

The privilege of sampling the first two, in their original make-up, was never accorded to me. If any

bottles of these famous wines still exist, they must be well concealed in some sybarite's cellar, who would not part with them for all the money in the world. And it would be a miracle if they were not relegated to the status of venerable relics. I shall never be able to enjoy those two fine vintages, and this is not among the minor sorrows of my life.

Of older Vintages, 1908 is now in the apogee of its glory — too short a life for so aristocratic a wine.

It was my privilege, a few years ago, to exchange with a friend who was, at the time, the head of one of the most reputable houses of Vintage shippers, a parcel of a special table wine, of my own making, for a certain quantity of his 1908 Vintage Port, which I had the occasion of tasting and particularly prized.

Some time later, when my friend had retired from business, following a lifetime of strenuous and noble work, I happened to come across him, and, in the course of the conversation, he asked me if I had any bottles left of the '08 of his brand. I admitted, with sanguine expectations, I had not exhausted the supply, as I liked the wine so much that I was reserving a bottle or two for any specially festive occasion that might present itself. «Don't do it», retorted my late friend, «take my advice and drink it». And my friend — bless him — was 100 % right. His wine had, most unexpectedly, accelerated its evolution in a disconcerting manner. It was not worth keeping any longer. Needless to say, I followed the advice of my friend, than whom nobody possessed a greater authority on the matter of Port in general and Vintage Port in particular.

Now, between you and me and the lamp-post, as the phrase goes, I still keep in my cellar other 1908's, which have stood the action of time in a more dignified manner,

to wit, a wine with an alluring dry finish, from a celebrated «Quinta», which, only the other day, proved conclusively to be holding its own against Father Time most gallantly.

1904, though four years its senior, will have a longer life, and 1896, my favourite Vintage, does not, so far, display any appreciable symptoms of decay.

1917, despite its delicate structure, is developing wonderfully, and 1920, though promising well, is as yet too crude for my taste to warrant any definite opinion. I have the impression that 1922 will rank as one of the great years in the Douro. 1927 is too young as yet—any forecasts about its further development would be premature. I surmise, however, that it will not go far either in deeds or years. It is, for the time being, a frolicsome youth who threatens to be disappointing in the future.<sup>1</sup>

The outstanding Vintage of the present century, in fact, the greatest wine grown in the Douro in the last 50 years or so, is, «nemine contradicente», I think, 1912. It is a big, stout wine, which embodies all the rare virtues that made the reputation of Port with our ancestors. If all goes well (and wine being a live organism is always liable to surprises) the Vintage Port of the year of 1912 will, doubtless, reach a venerable age and thus live up to the best traditions of the Douro.

I had some of it not so very long ago, at a banquet offered by the official bodies which superintend the production and export of Port wine, to the representative, in Lisbon, of a country which ranks as one of the best customers of the Douro wine. A few bottles were offered by a most reputable and respected shipper who took part

<sup>1</sup> The original essay — «Arte de beber o Vinho do Porto» — was written in 1935. Contrary to the opinion then expressed, and recorded here, the 1927 Vintage is turning out a splendid wine.



6—PICKING GRAPES IN THE DOURO

in the function, and, in order to do justice to the wine, and by way of a deserved tribute to its generous donor, I decided to serve it myself around the table. Not only did I happen to be one of the committee who organised the repast, but the number of guests hardly reached a score-and-a-half so that no special merit attached to the proceeding.

To each of the non-professionals (I mean those not actually in the Trade), who struck me as not having an intimate knowledge of Vintage Port (and you could count them on your fingers) I just whispered a few explanatory remarks, at the same time drawing their attention to the characteristics of the wine I was serving them.

After the toast of the shipper who had offered the wine was drunk, and still in the heat of the enthusiasm aroused by the event, I went round the table again to collect the views of the initiated, who were, of course, deeply impressed by the wine and did not conceal nor spare their praise thereof.

It so happened, however, that when I stopped beside the chair of one of the party who had been recently appointed to a highly responsible post and who had never in his life dealt with wine or even dreamt that the vagaries of his political career would eventually hoist him up to the top of so important a body as the one represented by him, he pointed with his forefinger to the glass where I had poured the precious Vintage (and which had been but slightly touched) and remarked rather dogmatically: «It isn't bad» and — indicating another glass — «but I like that one better» (and he mentioned the brand).

Now, prior to my serving the 1912, and to pave the way therefor, one or two Tawnies had been passed round the table, and the one the aforesaid executive was alluding to hailed from a well-known «Quinta» in the Upper Douro,

it is true, but it chanced to be not in what you might call the pink of condition. In point of fact, I had tasted it and found it (like my colleagues of the committee) rather «casky» and lacking in freshness, which denoted want of care. We had, nevertheless, decided to have it served (not, of course, to our guest of honour) in order not to disappoint the donor, a Douro farmer, proprietor of the «Quinta», who sent us the present together with the gentle reminder that a wine grown and matured by a farmer was entitled to be represented at the banquet.

On hearing the freshly-improvised critic's «verdict», I must have gone out of my wits (so one of my friends who was watching us closely told me later) for it appears that my eyes jumped, as it were, out of their orbits and I kind of sketched a gesture that could hardly be described as of a friendly nature. I managed, however, to swallow the insult as if it were directed at me, and, clearing my throat, I replied as dryly as I could make it: «Well, it's a matter of taste», and passed on.

When I regained my seat, still under high steam-pressure, the aforesaid citizen, after exchanging a few brief remarks with one of his neighbours, came over to my place and, explaining that some waiter or other had mixed the Vintage in his glass with some other wine, meekly apologized for, and withdrew, his former opinion.

Small wonder that the shipper, when we met the next day and discussed the previous night's events, remarked in his calm smiling way that giving certain wine to certain people was equivalent to casting pearls before swine.

I was rather disappointed, though, only the other day when, as the guest, at the Factory, of the Oporto manager of a well-known firm of Port shippers, I was given the opportunity of sampling a bottle of their 1912 Vintage, bottled in 1914. The wine was already past its best.

I was all the more puzzled as all the 1912's — and they are not a few — that have come under my nose and palate are withstanding — and actually benefitting by — the action of time, and fully promising to outlive their contemporaries.

For what mysterious reason is this — one of the most reputable shippers' brands — wearing out so prematurely? There must be a reason, and a strong one, too, but I fear nobody will ever penetrate the secret... which makes the study of wine all the more fascinating.

So much for Vintage Port, more of which presently. Let us now deal with late-bottled Vintage. The substance is the same as that of Vintage Port — the difference lies exclusively in the length of time spent by either in the wood. The latter is bottled 2 to 3 years after the vintage, and the former is only put in the glass receptacle after 5, 6 or even more years have elapsed since its birth.

Its stay in the cask clears the wine of most of its impurities and removes a good deal of the colouring-matter — it rounds off the corners and refines the wine thus preparing it for ulterior designs. The colour attains a ruby tone, and the wine, though not retaining the properties of the Vintage in their integrity, does, however, preserve a part of them so as to constitute an intermediary stage between the Vintage and the Tawny.

Some enthusiasts even prefer it to the Vintage proper, owing to the soothing effect produced on the wine, in the first phase of its evolution, by the wood.

Without aspiring to the majestic dignity of Vintage Port, the most virile of all wines produced in the world, the late-bottled possesses a charm of its own, which proceeds from the lady-like elegance of the Tawny allied to the imposing manliness of the Vintage.

If it does not claim the almost patriarchal austerity of the Vintage, it holds, however, enough dignity to

command its own devotees, who are legion in the northern countries.

In my cellar, so depleted — alas! — by frequent incursions, I counted some superb specimens of this high lineage wine hailing from the choicest «Quintas» in the Douro. My cellar-book records them in dithyrambic terms expressed by my guests (who, at my request, always penned their impressions therein) and, in most cases, added to by myself. They were the bottled sunshine of famous «Quintas».

Between you and me, there are still a few bottles left of some of them, which I hope to be able to relish in the company of a few friends (as rare as the remaining bottles) who seem to rejoice in that intellectual pleasure that Mr. T. Earle Welby<sup>1</sup> does not yet appear to have discovered in Port drinking. To be sure, we do not react to a work of art in the same manner — not even to the most consummate masterpiece. We have got, all of us, our own degree of sensibility — more or less acute. Therefore, if our intellect is slow to, or does not at all, apprehend the aesthetic pleasure afforded by such a masterpiece, the fault may not be ours, but it certainly is not the masterpiece's.

<sup>1</sup> «The Cellar Key» — Page 125.

## CHAPTER VII

I have read somewhere a curious concept of an ill-tempered philosopher: «Il y a des amis qui sont comme les vêtements — ils ne résistent pas à l'usage». But great wines are never disappointing. They always come up to our expectations and keep us the best of company in the fleeting moments of bliss or in the long hours of depression. «Bonum vinum laetificat cor hominis».

## CHAPTER VIII

Tawny Port, so called on account of its colour, is doubtless the most popular of all styles of Douro wine because it is not only the most accessible in price but also an all-purpose wine that can be enjoyed on every occasion.

Tawny Port, at its birth, comes out of the «lagar» with its mantle of deep purple and enters a wood receptacle where it spends all its life. The oxygen it requires for the manifold physico-chemical reactions is supplied through the pores of the wood and by the periodical and methodical airings it is subjected to.

The colouring-matter is precipitated as alcohols and acids combine in the presence of oxygen. The transformation of the colour operates very slowly, and the slower the better for the wine, which thus reveals its calibre. Quick-developing wine soon tires out and reaches the decrepit stage. This is a rule that applies to all vinous products. I have had the opportunity of tasting most of the liquorous wines grown in the world—from the Antipodes to this country. Apart from the noble ones, they all suffer from the same evil: their maturing is so rapid that they turn into a dull indifferent beverage in a few years time.

At the end of a more or less prolonged period of its existence, as its colour fades away until it assumes the topaz tonality, Tawny Port requires what in wine-lodge parlance is termed «refreshment». A given percentage of a young vigorous wine is added thereto from time to time, in order to provide it with the elements the gradual disappearance of which is brought about by the action of time. This is an operation always successfully carried out, the more so indeed as Tawny Port is essentially a blended wine and, therefore, the product of the assimilation of several vintages in infinitely varied proportions.

It is this periodical marriage that imprints its character on Tawny Port. Tawny Port is, therefore, a polygamous wine. Now and then it is wedded to other wine to acquire that freshness, coupled with age, which is its chief attraction. But each marriage must be a happy one — a love-match, so to speak. If the alliance is not made between two types of wine that complete each other, in the most perfect harmony, the result will be disastrous. Both wines, feeling ill-at-ease through excess of some elements, or deficiency of others, start quarrelling and soon succumb in an inglorious struggle to accommodate themselves to each other.

It is in the blending operations that the wine-expert reveals that admirable technique which is the product of a rare intuition backed by a lifetime's experience. The taster who officiates in this vinic sacrament is a consummate artist indeed. In a suitable room, well aired and with plenty of light, the blender has at his disposal, in well-ranged bins, samples of all the styles of wine stocked in the lodge, and it is with a masterly hand that he touches the keys of the elaborate instrument represented by the numerous bottles around him, with the contents of which he performs the most diversified and delicate operations.



7 — VINTAGE TIME IN THE DOURO

The secret of this veritable vinic symbiosis lies in the full knowledge of the peculiarities of each wine and the best way of blending them together.

I have heard some people speak of Vintage Tawny — a paradoxical and senseless expression, if the adjective «tawny» is used to describe not only the tint (which can easily be arrived at through the mixing of red and white wine) but also, and principally, the character of the wine. There is not, and there cannot be, such a thing as Vintage Tawny for the same reason that there cannot be a Tawny Vintage.

The two notions are not only conflicting but diametrically opposed. Vintage Port is one thing, Tawny Port quite another. If you left a wine grown in a Vintage year, and fully entitled to be classified as such, to mature in the wood for, say, 20 or 30 years, without the addition of grape-brandy to make good the losses incurred by evaporation or the blending with younger wine to refresh it, the resulting product would be hardly worth drinking.

The influence exercised by the wood and that played by the glass on the wine, have nothing whatsoever in common. Vintage Port matures in the bottle, and Tawny Port in the cask. And if you tried to reverse the positions, the result achieved would be equally disappointing. The wood wears out the wine, and the bottle makes it endure. In the former case, the wear and tear is caused by a liberal supply of oxygen; in the latter, the wine is preserved by the scarcity thereof.

So, Vintage Tawny is as nonsensical a notion as Tawny Vintage would be.

Tawny Port is a wine without history. It is the offspring of unknown parents. At the end of many years, its genealogy can hardly be traced, so varied and complex

it is. It is, so to speak, an anonymous wine, whereas Vintage Port is a thoroughbred.

Shortly before world war N.º 1, the British Association in Oporto, otherwise known as the Factory House, or, in short, the Factory, exchanged with the Wine Trade Club, in London, a parcel of Tawny Port against French wine. The Tawny was obtained through the admixture of 13 quarter-casks of wine supplied by the, then, 13 members of the Association, and the result was a nutty-flavoured, exhilarating wine, with a rich, distinctive bouquet, which soon conquered the laurels of celebrity in England under the designation of «Factory Port». It was my privilege to sample this ambrosial wine more than once, both at Oporto and in London, and, like most wine, it tasted better in England than in Portugal. It was simply delicious! But, how could any one trace, for example, the descent of such a wine, the product of the blending of 13 wines each of which was, in turn, the product of countless mixtures?

Each wine has its own peculiarities, and Tawny Port does not escape the rule.

But what a superb wine this is! The bouquet, the flavour, the harmonious balance of all its components, render Tawny Port a most fascinating wine. Time and wood make it as soft as velvet and lend it, so to speak the charm and grace of a chaste damsel and the perfume of wild flowers.

The «alma-mater» of a Tawny Port may be over a century old. Through careful blendings, the taster succeeds in maintaining its character almost indefinitely. It is practically an everlasting wine. Eternally old and eternally young, as it were, Tawny Port is indeed the most ingratiating of all wines, with its lively, nutty flavour so fresh on the palate.

If, according to Mr. Warner Allen, Vintage Port is the wine of philosophy, Tawny Port is the poetical and sentimental wine «par excellence». The former incites to meditation in its severe austerity—it is a wine full of dignity that detests noise and glaring lights.

The Tawny is graceful, light-hearted, almost frivolous. It bids for suppleness of mind, informal chattering, witty remarks in its charming volubility.

Port claims a suitable atmosphere, in a restricted though appreciative company, in order to display the plenitude of its attributes. It loathes crowds, but is sensitive to pleasant company. Drunk alone, Port tastes differently. It is a vain wine, that likes to be discussed... and praised.

A modern Chinese author—a shrewd observer and an outspoken critic—whose writings reflect a queer blend of Oriental wisdom with typical Western rationalistic culture, asserts in one of his books:<sup>1</sup>

«Now you cannot develop a national culinary art unless you are willing to discuss it and exchange your opinions on it. The first condition of learning how to eat is to talk about it. Only in a society wherein people of culture and refinement inquire after their cook's health, instead of talking about the weather, can the art of *cuisine* be developed. No food is really enjoyed unless it is keenly anticipated, discussed, eaten and then commented upon.»

Although eating and drinking are inevitably linked together, this concept can—I submit—be applied with equal, if not stronger, reason to good wine in general and to Port in particular.

<sup>1</sup> Lin Yutang — *My Country and my People*, page 338.

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A famous English judge of the past century, used to dine, according to tradition, in a room of the Court, in that dignified and austere atmosphere which is typical of British Justice. Upright in his medieval robes, he had his meal alone, by the dim light of a chandelier. On the table, encumbered with china, crystalware and old silver, stood a decanter of Port of a famous Vintage. He was waited on by a butler in livery, who left the room as soon as the judge, his master, began to help himself to the inspiring liquor. This was the solemn moment when His Lordship pondered upon the case under trial. The butler was directed to return to the room a little later and discreetly to place another bottle on the table should the first one be exhausted. It is chronicled that the most lucid and judicious «verdicts» of the celebrated Justice, which are cited to this day as models of jurisprudence, were always elaborated on the two-bottle-days.

Tawny Port is more moderate in its aspirations. Profound and laborious cogitations are inconsistent with its temperament. It is more a wine fit for witty impromptus. It is insuperable for inspiring repartee. I have the impression that M. de Talleyrand was very much addicted to it.

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When you transfer it to a bottle, Tawny Port, in contact with the air, is gratified with an overdose of oxygen, which it loses no appreciable time in assimilating — a matter of a few months only.

Accustomed as it was, however, to the ample space of a wooden container, through the pores of which it could

freely breathe, the new glass prison, so petty in its dimensions, acts on it like an instrument of torture. The texture of the glass is inimical to the admission of oxygen, which, following the assimilating period, the wine only finds — and that in infinitesimal proportions — in the headspace of the bottle or in the porosity of the cork. It suffocates, so to speak, and, having nothing to feed on, sees itself confronted with starvation, and gets excited and feverish. This reaction is denoted by a loss of colour and by a marked roughness on the palate. At the end of a few years, the wine falls into torpor and acquires a peculiar taste described as «bottle-flavour».

And like all wine kept too long in the bottle, it eventually becomes a wreck of itself.

This calls to mind a typical story which occurred many years ago, when the late and for-ever-mourned King Carlos was taking the waters at Pedras Salgadas, the Vichy (from a therapeutical viewpoint...) of Portugal, in the wine-district of Vila Real, the Civil Governor of which was an inspired poet who associated politics with the muses of Parnassus.

His Majesty held in great esteem the talented poet's sarcastic vein, and distinguished him with his friendship, which was respectfully and cordially reciprocated by his subject, who greatly admired the commanding intellect and magnanimous heart of his king.

One day, a Douro farmer, of aristocratic descent, made his way to Pedras Salgadas to present his duties to the king, from whom he requested the honour of a visit to his «Quinta», located at Pinhão, in the heart of the Douro wine-region — an invitation that His Majesty graciously accepted.

When the royal visitor was shown through the cellar, the gentleman-farmer begged of His Majesty the favour

of accepting a few bottles of a precious wine he had inherited from his ancestors — wine grown in that very property in so remote an epoch that one could still discern, on some of the squat containers, in dim figures, the date of 1793.

On the way back to Pedras Salgadas, King Carlos offered, in turn, one of the bottles to his governor-friend, and expressed the desire that the wine should be drunk at the birth of the latter's first grandson — a very distant eventuality since the governor, though married, was a very young man at the time.

Years rolled on, King Carlos was brutally murdered in the streets of Lisbon, and the governor, utterly disgusted, finally forsook politics to devote himself to the cult of the Muses and of his family.

Then, one day, the first grandson was born, in a town in the north of the country, to the ex-governor. Following the rapture of the first moments, the happy and proud grandfather fetched the bottle of the royal munificence, which he had jealously kept all the time in safe custody, and all preparations were made to celebrate the happy event adequately. The century-old relic was placed on a table, covered with a linen table-cloth, and the cut-glass vessels disposed around it. An attempt was made to draw out the cork. First discordant note: the cork could not bear the strain of the extracting apparatus, which insinuated itself through the stopper without appreciable signs of adherence. The scanty residues that at the cost of no small patience it was possible to extract melted like sugar in contact with the fingers. To sum up: the remnants of the cork were pushed into the bottle, and the contents poured into a decanter through a linen filter. The would-be celebrators were, however, rather disappointed by the colour of the liquid, which was abnormally light,

somewhat cloudy, and did not leave on the walls of the glass those tears which reveal a generous wine of the Douro.

Thereupon, the grandfather-poet delivered a flowery speech in the course of which he recalled the ever-loving memory of his royal friend and his liberality, and praised, in extravagant language, the wine with which the advent of his grandson was going to be feasted.

Presently, glasses were raised to lips with legitimate emotion. It so happened, however, that one of the party (no less a person than the newcomer's father), who was proud of his knowledge of wine, when taking the first sip suddenly became so afflicted that he could not keep the liquid in his mouth.

The party was aroused from its amazement by the grandfather's indignation, which took the form of a severe reprimand to the irreverent son-in-law. The latter, however, who had anticipated the event, produced forthwith a bottle of Port that, in age, could well pass for a great-grandson of the 1793 Vintage, but which had great ascendancy over it in terms of bouquet, flavour, body and fruit. The 1793 was reduced to a repellent concoction. It was but a corpse, and had been so for years on end.

This in the reason why I invariably refuse to sample «old relics», alleging, if need be, doctor's orders.



8—CARTING GRAPES TO THE «LAGAR»

## CHAPTER IX

To the vast majority of would-be wine-lovers, suggestion is practically everything. In some countries, and particularly in England, wine-minded people, who do not aspire to special knowledge of the subject, ask for, and accept, their suppliers' advice as to the style of wine best suited to the purpose in view, or, failing this, they place their confidence in reputable brands with long-established traditions to live up to. They may not get, in the latter case, exactly what they require, for Port is, as already stated, a versatile wine and may not suit all occasions precisely (though there is a style of Port for each occasion), but they always get their money's worth.

In Portugal, any label with a date inscribed thereon, is more often than not the «ne plus ultra» of those who pay tribute to Bacchus.

Another story. Somewhere in the outskirts of my native town, a picnic-party was organized many years ago, to which were invited two of my brothers-in-law, at the time young students and, to-day, one of them an engineer and the other a physician (and let me add not only for the sake of family peace but in justice as well) both of them highly esteemed in their professions. The invitation was, however, an insidious one, for the promoters of the function knew only too well that I possessed a well-provided cellar and they (the simpletons!) had conceived

the machiavellian plan of depriving me of some of my wine, through the friendly intercession of my relatives. And with the complicity of some young lady-friends of the neighbourhood, the picnic organizers brought influence to bear on my brothers-in-law, who, to avoid further complications, promised to snatch away the coveted nectar from me.

On second thoughts, however, they decided to spare my cellar, and, being young and mischievous, made up their minds to play a trick on the picnic-party. They went to the local grocer and acquired, for a ridiculous sum, two bottles of so-called «Vinho Fino do Douro» of the kind that one used to see, at the time, in the windows of country shops, with rainbow-coloured labels.

They took the bottles home, removed the blatant labels, and camouflaged them with dust, cobwebs, and other ingredients. And a parchment-like strip was pasted on the bellies, displaying the impressive figures of 1815 — the (in this country) famous Vintage that so many people still seem to enjoy, but which I have never drunk, nor do I care to.

At the pre-arranged hour and place, my relatives made their appearance each carrying a bottle hanging from their fingertips. It goes without saying that they were received with loud cheers, which became even louder when they disclosed, in a rapidly spread whisper, that, in a moment of rare generosity, I had produced two bottles of the celebrated 1815 Vintage — and the hypocrites started shouting: «Let no one touch us on account of the sediment». The two «rare jewels» were deposited in a safe place under the watchful eye of the chief organizer of the picnic who could not refrain from expressing, there and then, his warmest thanks to my relatives for having dug out those relics, not precisely for his sake, as he

would be quite content with something not quite so good, but for the sake of so-and-so (and he mentioned the name of a «nouveau-riche» recently arrived from Brazil) who knew a lot about wines and appreciated them in the highest degree.

And all of them (excepting my brothers-in-law — youngsters of good taste) and including the «Brazilian», drank and relished the muck as if it were genuine 1815.

When my relatives told me the story the next day, they ironically commented that if all the wishes formulated on the occasion for my health and prosperity could be materialized, I would be the happiest and longest-lived of human beings.

A prominent Port wine shipper, who belongs no more to this world, confided to me that he offered at his residence in Paris, to a few friends of the highest social standing, a glass of magnificent old wine grown in his «Quinta» — one of the most justly celebrated in one of the most renowned districts of the Upper Douro.

At a certain stage of the proceedings, a countess of somewhere or other, in the height of her enthusiasm, exclaimed: «Tiens! Je n'ai jamais bu un Malaga pareil!» Which proves once again that ignorance has no respect for persons or places.

And what had shocked him most — the respected and much lamented merchant added rather indignantly — was to have wasted such a wine on such people.

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There exists another variety of Port called Ruby, which owes its designation to its colour. Ruby Port is the result of the blending of fine rich wines — usually Vintage wines — from various crops. It passes through the

preliminary stages in the wood, and when it reaches the tone of burnt ruby, it is fit for drinking. It is closely related to the late-bottled Vintage and improves in the bottle, on the walls of which it throws a more or less compact crust—the residue of all the chemical reactions borne by the wine in the developing process.

Ruby Port is very popular with wine-lovers in the northern regions, where the Tawny has, of late, lost much of its favour. It is now a fashionable wine, owing not only to its properties, which make of it a full-bodied, fruity wine (a wine that you can «chew») but also to the fact that it is, of all those of the same lineage, the most accessible in price.

It ought to be largely consumed in this country, as it does not disdain the amenities of our climate. It is, however, wholly ignored by the Portuguese, who continue to adhere to their prejudice in favour of longevity in the liquorous wine of the Douro.

Ruby Port can be drunk with pleasure at the end of 8 or 10 years. Of all varieties of Port, it is the one which most rapidly acquires that «ensemble» of attributes that make a wine worth drinking. And, as already stated, it enjoys the inestimable advantage of improving in the bottle—a factor also to be taken into consideration.

Crusted Port, to which so many wine-lovers are particularly addicted, is a full, heavy wine, deep in colour and stout in body, as a rule a blended wine, which matures in the bottle on the inner walls of which it discards a thick crust at the end of a more or less prolonged lapse of time—say, 10 to 15 years. It acquires a character and distinction which are very much appreciated by Port-lovers.

## CHAPTER X

Now, coming to cellars, the primary concern of the real wine-lover should be the starting of a cellar—an objective within the means of most people, even those of moderate ambitions. To begin with, a proper location must be selected bearing in mind that wine requires repose and seclusion. Sudden or extreme changes of temperature are fatal to any noble product of the vine, irrespective of its type or origin.

«A wine cellar too hot or too cold  
murders wine before it is old»

runs the popular saying. It has been authoritatively asserted that the ideal temperature for the maturing and proper keeping of wine must be around 15 degrees centigrade (59° Fahrenheit) and that the difference between Winter and Summer should not exceed 2 to 3 degrees. But a difference of a couple of degrees more or less will not affect the wine adversely provided proper care is taken.

Underground cellars, i. e., in the basement, respond best to the required conditions. But if they are not available, a quiet room in the interior of the house will do provided: a) there are no steam pipes in it; b) the place is ventilated; c) it is accessible only to subdued sunlight.

The renovation of the air precludes, or minimizes, the propagation of the thousand and one pests that infest closed and badly illuminated rooms; on the other hand, a discreet light favours the wine in its rest.

Drastic hygienic conditions should be observed — neither rubbish nor straw envelopes or empty cases, which would foster the breeding of the countless parasites whose diet is constituted by the corks. Some of them are so tiny that they manage to escape the voracious, though beneficial, appetite of spiders, the disinterested and ever-present friends of cellar owners.

This is the reason why the air and its constant renovation are so essential to the welfare of the wine — «a live, complex and most delicate organism», in the words of an eminent oenologist.<sup>1</sup>

To sum up: the most suitable location for the cellar should be a room in the basement the windows of which must be protected by wire netting, which will bar the ingress of pests and allow the free circulation of air. Such a location further enjoys the advantage of preserving the wine from sudden changes of temperature and the pernicious effects thereof.

As to the position of the bottles, these should be laid down flat, i. e., in an horizontal position with the labels or marks uppermost. When left standing, the corks soon dry up and allow the passage of air into the bottle and, together with the air, the vicious «*Micoderma Aceti*», whose function it is to convert alcohol into acetic acid, manage to sneak through and ruin the wine. And nobody cares, I presume, to drink vinegar instead of wine.

As to the most suitable manner of keeping the bottles in the cellar, the notion that they should be placed in

<sup>1</sup> Gianformaggio — *Enologia Pratica*, Cap. 1, pag. 3.

parallel rows in appropriate bins, so constructed as to allow the free circulation of the air, needs no explanation, so obvious is it. Iron bins serve the purpose better than those made of wood, which are more liable to the assault of parasites.

The adoption of rectangular compartments wherein the bottles are piled up together cannot be recommended. The withdrawal of a bottle from the bunch is likely to cause the others to slide one way or the other with pernicious effects on the contents.

Wine demands absolute repose in order successfully to undergo the slow, aging process. When, as a result of sundry chemical reactions, it has developed a crust or thrown off lees, the disturbing of the bottle naturally brings about the remixture of these by-products with the wine.

Now, I am quite aware of the fact that wine, generally speaking, does improve when submitted to a sea-trip. Such descriptions as East-India Sherry or Madeira are no mere trading abstractions. In the past century, wine-merchants were in the habit of putting in the hold of East-India-sailing traders a few casks filled with young wine, which, after the protracted round sea-voyage, displayed discernible signs of progress in their evolution. This phenomenon was wrongly attributed to the differences in temperature and to the motion of the ship. Temperature, which plays so important a part in the ripening of wine, was certainly responsible, and in a large measure, too, for the acceleration of the aging process — an even, high temperature such as prevailed in the sealed-up interior of the vessels that plied between Western Europe and the Far-East. But the moisture of the sea also contributed, in no trifling degree, to the results achieved. The ill-effects of the rolling of the ship were

greatly neutralized by the youth of the wine and outweighed by the beneficial factors. The most adverse conditions for the maturing and conservation of wine are precisely differences in temperature and movement, notably the sharp motion caused by the pitching of the vessel in stormy weather.

Now, some reference should be made to corks, the grade of which is of paramount importance in the keeping of wine. This is a material in which the wine-lover and -merchant cannot afford to save money, lest the economy prove a boomerang. Stoppers should be made from the very best compact corkwood and have a length of, at least, 5 centimetres. The diameter of the cork must be slightly broader than that of the «mouth» of the bottle so as to allow of sufficient compression.

The corking of the wine is of the utmost importance. If defective corks (too porous or too thin or too short) are employed, the wine will rapidly deteriorate. It is a pity that no small number of merchants and wine-lovers have not yet realized this long-established fact. More often than not (particularly in this country), one comes across badly corked wine, which, in most cases, is not worth drinking. Most people blame the wine whereas the fault rests entirely with the stopper. Hence, the good old French habit of submitting the cork to the inspection of the client who orders a bottle of fine wine. The condition of the cork reflects that of the wine. A practice which, incidentally, should be universally adopted.

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A problem which has stirred up a great deal of controversy is the immunization of the cork against the passage of air into the bottle and the voracious appetite



9 — PARTIAL VIEW OF OPORTO

of bacteria, whose diet is mostly composed of that commodity.

Two methods are mainly followed: the wrapping of the top of the glass receptacle by means of a metallic capsule, which is the more popular, and the use of sealing wax spread over the bottle top. The latter process is generally employed in Vintage Ports, which require, for proper keeping, a more enduring protection than the one afforded by the thin, easily perishable coating of tin and lead of which the capsule is made, as a rule. The only drawback is that this process requires a well-trained hand. A liberal portion of high-grade sealing wax should be slowly melted in a glazed earthenware pot and be kept in fusion throughout the operation. The top of the bottle must then be dipped into the paste to the extent of an inch or so. A slow rotation of the receptacle will ensure an even coating of the wax.

Special care must be taken to avoid the formation of air-bubbles in the coating. Cracked air-bubbles will shelter numberless parasites. When properly performed, this is, doubtless, the ideal method of preserving Vintage Port.

Another school advocates, as already stated, the use of metallic capsules for bottled wine in general. It is held, however, by some authorities, that the emanations of the lead contained in the metallic alloy manage to find a passage through the pores of the cork and contaminate the wine. A subject upon which I shall refrain from expressing an opinion, for chemistry never was a strong point with me.

I may, nevertheless, be permitted to tackle the capsule-practice from a more empirical standpoint and submit that if the capsule does not adhere tightly and evenly to the neck of the bottle, so as to bar the intrusion of micro-organisms, the ill-effects on the cork and wine will be evident.

In my opinion, by far the safest way of preserving the cork consists in enveloping the bottle mouth with viscous capsules of hydrolate of cellulose or any other plastic material. When dipped into lukewarm water for a few minutes, they expand and are then applied. At the end of a short time, the material shrinks and adheres closely to the bottle. This is also, to my mind, the best preservative against cellar pests.

Only wine the maturation of which takes place in the glass must be subjected to these elementary precautions, as it is of supreme importance that the cork should last as long as the wine. The renewal of corks results in not only the waste of esters but the dislocation of the crust or sediment as well, which is detrimental to the wine.

The universal use of capsules, of a more or less fanciful make-up, by the liquor trade, aims at making the goods look more attractive. The capsule, in the vast majority of cases, is a mere feature of the general appearance of the bottle.

Now, I think that a few words about the proper time for bottling Port will fit into this chapter. This operation had better be carried out in dry, cold weather, preferably when a sharp wind is blowing from the northern quadrant.

Allow the cask to rest for, at least, 8 days prior to the bottling. This is the minimum required for the wine to «settle down», in other words, to adapt itself to the new surroundings.

It goes without saying that the bottling paraphernalia must be kept spotlessly clean, and, as an additional precaution, thoroughly rinsed with the wine to be bottled. Put the corks into the same liquid for at least 24 hours before using them.

As to the bottles proper, though, of course, properly washed and drained, they should be rinsed with the same

wine so as to avoid contamination by some recalcitrant hydrous residue left inside. Unless you have a sterilizing plant at your disposal, in which case you will save the amount of liquid required for rinsing.

Do not bottle Port on a warm, sultry day, and avoid, if you can, performing the operation in the early Spring, when the sap begins to flow in the vine. By a mysterious biological phenomenon, the wine gets «excited» as a result of the resumption of life in the parent stock, following the long hibernating period.

Mother Nature jealously holds many secrets, and this is not the least intriguing of them.

What relation exists between the rebirth of life in a vine-plant and in the product thereof? The fact is that in the Spring, when the vine begins to sprout, that «lively, complex and most delicate» organism that is wine becomes so restive in its abode that the reaction is only too apparent.

Therefore, the wine had better be left alone at such a time of the year. The «fever» dies gradually away until the wine returns to its old self again.

## CHAPTER XI

At what temperature should Port be served? Broadly speaking, the temperature best suited for any wine varies in relation to its kind or type. Taking, for instance, the case of white table wines in general, including Champagne, which are always served cold, most people seem not to know the reason why this practice is invariably followed.

To begin with, white wine lacks that equilibrium which is the chief attraction of its red brother. It is, in short, and broadly speaking, a deficient wine. The scarcity or want of certain elements renders all white wine liable to many accidents.<sup>1</sup> One of them is cloudiness. A sudden change in temperature will cause most white wines to lose their original limpidity. Hence, the ill-advised practice of serving white wine in coloured glasses. The colour conceals or disguises the cloudiness of the wine. Moreover, and generally speaking, there is no other means of keeping it clear and bright but through the addition of sulphur, which not only makes up for the lack of basic elements but acts as a disinfectant as well. Sulphur, in anhydrous form, or potassium ferro-cyanide

<sup>1</sup> «The first duty of wine is to be red», says the first versicle of a taster's bible adopted by one of the leading Port shippers. Or, again, «all wine would be red, if it could».

(«blue fining»). The use of the latter, however, is strictly forbidden by law in all wine-producing countries except Germany.

All wine-growing countries barring Germany, where the art of treating wine appears to have reached the summit of efficiency, have enacted the most drastic legislative measures against the use of such a drug. So that sulphur, in doses governed by law, is administered to the wine instead. But there is no brighter wine than the one submitted to the «blue fining» treatment. To wit, those superlative, star-bright, lemon-coloured Hocks and Moselles the mere look of which makes your mouth water.

Most of the sulphur (in various forms), after producing the desired effect, evaporates as a result of the manipulations the wine is subject to. Most, but not all of it. A certain percentage is retained in the liquid, and there is nothing more unpleasant to one's nose and palate than the smell and/or taste of sulphur.

Now, at a temperature of, say, 7 or 8 degrees centigrade,<sup>1</sup> the nose and the palate, which are interdependent, do not sense either, although they respond to other peculiarities of the wine, such as bouquet, sweetness,<sup>2</sup> and body. Hence, the reason why natural white wine should always be served chilled, but not too cold, as too low a temperature will deprive any wine... of everything.

If you are not convinced, try and drink wine at a temperature of, say, 18 or 20 degrees centigrade.<sup>3</sup> The smell and taste of sulphur are unbearable even to an indifferent nose and palate.

<sup>1</sup> 44 to 46 Fahrenheit.

<sup>2</sup> Which is also partly affected by a low temperature.

<sup>3</sup> 64 to 68 Fahrenheit.

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Red wine in general tastes best at the temperature of the room in which it is served, provided this is not too low. An average of 16/18 degrees centigrade<sup>1</sup> is the best suited for any kind of red wine.

To revert, however, to Port, the first thing to do is to decant the wine. This is a much more complex operation than most people think. I have no hesitation in stating that no discerning judge of wine or true wine-lover will ever delegate this preliminary task to mercenary hands. Only those who entertain the deepest affection for a fine wine will understand these words.

The bottle or bottles should be withdrawn from the bin with the utmost care so as not to disturb the wine. No shaking, if you please. If it is a Vintage, thus «awakened» from its long slumber, the bottle should be fetched in the early morning in a vertical position and thus placed and kept all the day long in the dining-room, so as to allow the sediment or bits of crust aroused by the uplifting of the bottle to fall, and to let the wine acquire the temperature of the room. I take it that with most people (and I am one of them), the proper time to enjoy Vintage Port is after the evening meal. An hour before dinner, the stopper should be so drawn<sup>2</sup> as to avoid the admixture of any particle of sealing wax or cork with the wine.

Now is the time for decanting the wine, which should be performed against the light of a candle (the one I prefer)

<sup>1</sup> 60/64 Fahrenheit.

<sup>2</sup> I need certainly not dwell on the obvious advantages of a reliable corkscrew (the lever-type one being to me the best) or the use of tweezers.

or electric bulb, so that one may keenly follow the gentle but continuous flow of the liquid into the decanter. The operation is terminated as soon as the first signs of sediment or crust appear at the bottle neck. Beeswing, which often appears in late-bottled Vintage and denotes, as a rule, venerable age, is not prejudicial.

In passing the wine from the bottle into the decanter, the liquid must be allowed to slide down against the walls of the latter. It is important not to let the wine fall helpless into the middle of the new recipient—an action that would disturb the wine and deprive it, right away, of a substantial percentage of the esters so long accumulated.

And in order to let the wine stretch itself out, and its esters to expand through the narrow opening of the decanter, this had better be left without the stopper. On entering the room, the atmosphere will be deliciously impregnated with the perfume of the wine.

The rinsing of the decanter with a few drops of the wine to be racked is essential. It is an easy operation for anyone with a steady hand. Easy and indispensable for, no matter how thoroughly the decanter may have been washed and drained, there always remains the possibility of a tiny refractory drop of water being left unnoticed, which would be enough to pollute the wine.

The decanting of late-bottled Vintage Port (in fact, of all wines) is subject to the same rules as above stated, the only difference, in relation to the Vintage, being that the length of time during which the decanter is left unstoppered (about an hour before the meal being served) can and had better be reduced, as this style of wine is evidently not so exacting as its senior in the expansion of esters.

As to Ruby Port, you need not trouble to leave the decanter open. The small space left in the new container is ample enough for the wine to stretch itself at its leisure.



10—PORT WINE LODGE AT VILA NOVA DE GAIA

It is advisable to have Tawny Port decanted in the cellar. It gains with the cellar's temperature, regardless of the season. In the Summer, the coolness, by contrast, of the cellar will render it more pleasing to the palate. In cold weather, the comparative warmth of the basement will enhance its virtues.

Under abnormal heat, which, in the Summer, is frequently the case in my part of the world, I am accustomed to cooling off the glass with a lump of ice before helping myself to the wine. A couple of drops out of the decanter will wash out any particles of water that the melting ice may have left on the walls of the glass. This is a simple practice that yields tangible results. It is almost universally adopted at the Oporto British Club — that sanctuary of Port Wine. The slight drop in temperature that the Tawny is submitted to does not seem to impair its qualities. And it renders the wine more palatable.

Both these operations — withdrawal of the bottle from the bin and decanting — are always performed by the host in person, unless he is lucky enough to afford the services of a well-trained butler and does not care to tackle the job himself. However, wine-minded butlers are getting scarcer everyday, and the number of those who can afford their services is not increasing either.

To put it bluntly: he who owns a cellar is duty-bound to undertake himself this preliminary work if he entertains any respect for his guests, or for himself either. No mercenary hands, however dutiful and experienced, will ever do it with that devotion, made of zeal and affection, which only the fortunate possessor of superlative wine can feel.

I still remember the affectionate manner in which the senior partner of one of the oldest and best known Oporto houses used to «caress» some of his wine when he entered

the lodge. He actually fondled the casks and patted them like priceless treasures. To be sure, my friend's wine ranked amongst the finest ever produced in the Douro, and he knew it better than anybody else. He was a bottle-man—bless him—to his dying day, some years ago, well past the 80-year-old mark.

Some so-called wine-connoisseurs often resort, I am told, when decanting an old wine, to a filter either of paper or linen. This is—I submit—a practice that must be condemned. The lees should not, under any pretext, (and least of all that of greediness), be mixed up with the wine, even though they are retained by the tight meshes of the filter.

Another current mistake should be avoided: the pouring in the same decanter of wine from more than one bottle, though of the same breed and year, i. e., theoretically identical.

It can almost be assumed that there are not two identical bottles, particularly in relation to Vintage or late-bottled Vintage Port. Even though the maturing of the wine be accomplished under equal conditions, the mere fact that the capacity of the bottles is often enough not mathematically identical, exerts no mean influence over the evolution of the wine. The larger the bottle the slower the aging process of the wine and, therefore, the longer its span of life. This being the reason why in some countries, and specially in the United-Kingdom, bottles are used which hold twice (Magnum), thrice (Tappit Hen), and four times (Jeroboam) as much as the usual Quart. Moreover, the cork is of such consequence that, not very rarely, two bottles of the same lot contain different wines. Each bottle should, then, be served by itself, in the plenitude of its merits and responsibilities.

The pouring of the wine direct from the bottle into the glasses, even with the aid of the oblong wicker-basket or cradle of French custom, unless performed by an uncommonly steady hand, is likely to expose the crust or sediment to a seesaw movement which will prove fatal to the wine. To say nothing of the fact that the wine, after its long imprisonment in the bottle, craves, so to speak, for stretching and breathing space before revealing its latent and concentrated properties. And the decanter serves such a purpose better than anything else.

But it also affords the wine the opportunity of displaying its colour, so pleasing to one's eye, specially if the decanter is one of those artistically-shaped, cut-glass recipients that abounded in England and of which there existed a handful of beautiful specimens in this country in a less materialistic era. And eyesight plays no mean part in the enjoyment of wine.

If and when duly encouraged, superlative wine will exhibit the full opulence of its tints like a peacock.

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Talking now of glasses calls back to mind the not very distant time when, in public places, Port used to be poured into glasses which were perfectly ridiculous from the double standpoint of shape and size. For the glass is one of the main factors in the subtle and complex art of serving, drinking and enjoying wine. By unanimous assent, the ideal wine glass is the tulip-like one, resting on a fine stem, not too slim though, and on a broad circular base. And it should be ample enough to hold a liberal portion of wine, which will thus disclose the full beauty of its colour. Wine contained in a small vessel, when submitted to the direct incidence of light, will strike

our eyes as a liquid of feeble tonality. The richest wine when seen through a test-tube, will appear as almost colourless. It is, therefore, quite essential that the glass be sufficiently large to avoid the disadvantage of excessive transparency.

For one of the primary acts of the vinic liturgy belongs to our eyes, which admire and are gratified by the radiant colour of the wine and the glittering sparkles reflected on it by the discreet light of the room, and thus generously excite our olfactory and tasting senses.

The glass should never be filled to the brim. Enough empty space must be left to allow the esters to expand and to excite the nose, which beatifically absorbs them through the narrow opening of the glass. If you fill it up entirely, the esters will disperse in the air and you will miss the elating pleasure of feeling them. And if you encircle it with the palm and fingers, you will not only enjoy the gratifying sensation of a more intimate possession of the wine, but you will also suavely stimulate the volatilization of the esters.

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«Nunc est bibendum»! After pouring the wine into the glass<sup>1</sup> and fondling it with your hand, gently swirl it around for awhile in order to foster the development of the volatile matter, and, against the light, admire the colour in its multiple reflections. Then inhale the bouquet. Do this two or three times, after which take a sip and spread it all over the interior of the mouth so as to stimulate the tasting glands. Presently, a larger mouthful,

<sup>1</sup> Beware of strange kitchen odours, the result of careless washing and rinsing.

which will give you a more satisfying sensation, and so on. If, in your eagerness, you swallow the wine all at once, you will be deprived of the thrilling impression on your palate of, as it were, each of its particles.

Whoever drinks a glass of good wine in a hurry gives a shocking impression of bad taste, and ill-breeding, too.

A friend of mine used to keep in his well-provided cellar a bottle or two of cheap, indifferent Port, which he had always served to those of his guests who drank his superlative wine unconcernedly. As soon as his keen observing eye detected a non-discerning drinker (one of those who imbibe wine like beer), he invariably addressed him, whilst caressing his own glass: «I can see that you are a lover and a good judge of wine. Permit me to offer you something particularly fine that I keep in reserve for the connoisseurs», or words to that effect. And the «extra-special» was produced and «duly» enjoyed by the pseudo-wine-lover, whose sole interest in wine consisted merely in emptying glass after glass.

## CHAPTER XII

Not all kinds of food agree with Port. Some antagonize the «divine beverage» to such an extent that it turns sulky and senseless when confronted with them. Sweets neutralize the glucose, thus robbing the wine of one of its chief attractions. Coarse food in general is any good wine's enemy number one. The finer the wine the more exacting it is in respect of the fare with which it is to be served.

To put it on broad lines, fish courses naturally claim a white wine, whereas the red tastes better with meat dishes. I shall not go into details as to which wine had better be served with which food. In the present essay I am mainly concerned with the cream of wines, namely, Port. Port at its best, be it understood, and in comparison with the best of all other wines.

What goes particularly well with Port is cheese, which, in its alkaline composition, constitutes the ideal food to accompany it or any other wine, for that matter. Any of the world-renowned cheeses will enhance the flavour of Port. Take, for example, that king of cheeses — Stilton. It makes a perfect match with Vintage Port.

We produce in this country a type of cheese, made of ewe's milk, known as «Queijo da Serra», as it is made on the Serra da Estrela, the loftiest mountain in Portugal, which, at its best, is, to my taste, one of the finest dairy products in the world. On the other hand, there also

exists a home-made product that goes by the name of «Marmelada», which has nothing in common with the ubiquitous English marmalade, as it is made of a fruit called «Marmelo» (quince) and sugar. It is jelly-like, sweet and slightly acid. Well, to my knowledge and pleasant surprise, these two ingredients, if I may call them so, i. e., «Queijo da Serra» and «Marmelada», when consumed together, are hardly surpassed by any other victuals in inducing a refined Tawny to disclose all its delightful features.

These gastronomical concepts and many other similar notions are, of course, the result of personal experience, and, as such, may not be endorsed, as it were, by the world at large. Our psychological make-up, with all its idiosyncrasies, differs from individual to individual, so much so indeed that it has been asserted on the highest authority that, in this respect, there are not two individuals alike in the world. Which all amounts to saying that taste plays a decisive part in the appraisal of everything that affects our senses. So, in expressing these views or notions, I am simply voicing personal experiences without pretending, in the least, to impose them on anybody. To be sure, they are more or less orthodox and accepted, as such, by Port-lovers and -connoisseurs. However, the most practical and also pleasant way of ascertaining whether or not you agree with them is to check them by experience.

Within obvious limitations, the popular «dictum»: «one man's meat is another man's poison» can be applied here with propriety.

Resuming, however, the trend of my remarks about wine and food, Port is only served in my household together with cheese and after the removal from the table of all sweets and other victuals likely to depreciate it.



11 — PORT WINE GLASS

At the British Association, in Oporto, an old tradition demands that, before the Port is served, the guests retire to an adjoining room (dessert-room) where the table and the arrangement of seats are a replica of the dining-room, so that the wine may be enjoyed in a clean atmosphere, free from the odours of food. This used to be an 18th century custom practised until recent times by the best families of Oporto, and now, I believe, confined to the Factory. It is not in vain that the British Association in Oporto enjoys the reputation of serving the finest Ports in the world. And with the right food, too.

If you are not fortunate enough to have enjoyed a well-matured Stilton with a robust Vintage Port at the Factory, or elsewhere for that matter, you have certainly missed something in your life. Port is so sensitive that it definitely appreciates a chance of displaying its most recondite virtues. Needless to say, the salutary practice above referred to is not in daily use, and is now only reserved for great occasions. Again, «est modus in rebus». You do not drink superlative wines everyday for the simple reason that, if you did, you would soon get tired of them. Like all good things in life, they should be enjoyed with moderation, the golden rule of all true wine-lovers. And they are the better appreciated by contrast. Besides, the old Latin wisdom had it that «Varietas delectat» or, as Cowper put it:

«Variety is the very spice of life,  
That gives it all its flavour.»

Now, to revert to gastronomic issues, cheese is not the only kind of food that suits Port Wine. Some varieties of unsweetened biscuits, cheese-straws, roasted

almonds, walnuts and, above all, olives of any kind, are particularly pleasing to the Douro nectar. I need hardly add, I presume, that all these neutralizers of the palate only become effective if and when preceded by the kind of food befitting that harmonious «ensemble» to which I have alluded. Heavy, coarse food destroys the charm of a noble wine, be it Port or otherwise. Equilibrium in every respect is essential to the blood of the grape.

One had better also take into account the wines served throughout the meal, as their character may numb the palate and deprive it of the coveted receptivity for the outstanding wine.<sup>1</sup> As a general rule, at gastronomic functions, it is advisable always to proceed from the simple to the complex in order to attain the climax. To start with, a dry white wine should be served with the fish, followed by a red which will fit in with butcher's meat or game, and, at cheese time,<sup>2</sup> Port will make its appearance. All dry white wine goes well with fish. To my taste, however, Hock and Moselle and some of their relatives such as Alsatian Träminer and, in general, all Riesling products, easily beat the rest of the bunch. The only trouble with these wines is that, in order to appreciate them fully, you have to drink them while they are comparatively young. Freshness, which is one of their main features, does not survive a long confinement in the bottle.

I had in my cellar some fine specimens of Moselle of a famous vintage — in point of fact, of 1921, the «annus

<sup>1</sup> Port and Champagne cannot be consumed together. They hate each other. Either is too proud to allow of the other's company. They come to grips and put up a fierce fight to the distress of the battle-ground.

<sup>2</sup> «Un dessert sans fromage est une belle à qui il manque un oeil» — Brillat-Savarin.

mirabilis» of the Rhine and Moselle — which I selfishly kept longer than was good for their evolution. They appealed so much to me that I did not care to exhaust the small parcel that, at no small expense and hardship, I had secured from a reliable source. In other words, it was too good to be consumed all at once. Some years ago, when, on a festive occasion, I opened one of the treasured bottles, my disappointment was only equalled by the regret of having kept it so long.

I am referring, of course, to the dry type of Rhine wine. The sweet wines, by Sauterne standards, like the rather numerous, though not at all abundant, «Trockenbeeren Auslese» (what memories of a 1926 «Berncastler Doktor» drunk in London!) are entirely different in their structure, which enables them not only to stand but also to appreciate the soothing effect of age.

I confess that, in a broad sense, I am not very much addicted to white wines, which have always struck my nose and palate as incomplete, unbalanced products of the grape. However, Hocks and Moselles, particularly the latter, and other wines bred by the Riesling plant, stand apart. They are in a class by themselves and represent, so far as I am concerned, the exception that proves the rule.

There exists in the North of Portugal a very small region, bathed by the Minho river, known by the name of Monsão (wherefrom hailed some of the wine shipped in the 17th century to England, under the name of Portugal wine), which produces one of the nicest white wines I have ever tasted. It is a light, very mellow, delicate wine, with the mixed bouquet of violets and wild flowers, very fresh on the palate, which sends you into raptures of physical and intellectual bliss when you are lucky enough to get it from the original stock.

Except for that steely taste which is peculiar to the Moselles, it is the nearest approach to them that I have ever sampled. And I say «sampled» on purpose because the output of the indigenous stock-plant is so scarce that you can almost count the number of pipes yielded on the fingers of your hand.

I opened, the other day, the last bottle of a couple of dozen of the 1933 vintage which had been given me. It was still candle-bright and the colour had lost next to nothing of its primitive lemon shade. But part of the freshness was perceptibly gone. The trouble, you see, with most white wines is that, at the end of a number of years, they get oxidized and become unfit for consumption. «Madérisés», the French call them when they reach that stage.

Before bringing this chapter to a close, I should like to make a brief reference to another very good white wine bred on the slopes of Ermida, in the Douro, but not within the recognised wine-region, of which some was served, only the other day, at a luncheon offered in Oporto to an ex-royal and very distinguished personage. The vintage was 1935. What a wine! I ordered forthwith a couple of dozen from the shipper, who shared with me the honour of being present. But I could not get the '35. We had drunk the shipper's last bottles. I got, instead, some '38, which is just nearly as good now, and will be, I presume, just as good in a couple of years. I admit quite openly that I had no idea whatsoever of the existence, in this country, of such a delicacy as the old white Ermida. I did not think that the rather popular and fairly abundant white Ermida would so improve in the bottle as to render it a most attractive wine, with a wonderful floral bouquet.

## CHAPTER XIII

Now, passing to red wines, give me every time a good specimen of any of the wide range of French vinous products. I need hardly add that Burgundy and Claret are at the top of the tree. They are to me, and to most wine-enthusiasts, I have no doubt, among the finest wines in the world. «Château-Neuf-du-Pape» (Côtes du Rhone) although heavier and different in character, makes a good second, even though, in some years, it outclasses its competitors of the «Côte d'Or» and of the «Bordellais». I am not alluding to the «Crus classés» alone. Some of the so-called «Petits Vins» or «Vins Bourgeois», rank outstandingly amongst the great variety of French vinicolous products.

Have you ever tasted a young, vigorous, ruby-coloured, rose-fresh, slightly greenish «Beaujolais» with an underdone «Gigot de Mouton de Près-Salés»? If not, and if you are an amateur of the art of good living, take my word for it — it is a real treat!

All this «à-propos» the wines that should be served with the fish and meat courses. I am now through with the fish, including salmon and sole, which Monsieur Simon solemnly declares agree with red wine, also the red-mullet which, according to Mr. Earle Selby's personal taste, provides good company to the same colour.

Regarding meat courses, there are, of course, two distinct classes which cannot be equally treated from the standpoint of wine. Butcher's meat and game require different wines. The former will content itself with a light red, whereas the latter requires something heavier — and shall I say «spicier»? — to yield its full flavour. The spicier the game, the heavier the wine. By «heavy» I mean a full-bodied, high strength wine. «High» within, of course, the limitations of the so-called natural (non-fortified) wines, say, up to 14 degrees Gay-Lussac.

The typical wines with which to enjoy butcher's meat and game are «nemine discrepante», I believe, Claret and Burgundy, respectively. Or wines akin to them.

Leaving aside some European vine-products, on which I would refrain from expressing an opinion because I am not very familiar with them, let me tell you that the Iberian Peninsula produces delightful table wines, than which it is hard to find, outside the privileged districts of France, more attractive specimens. In Portugal proper, the discerning wine-lover will find a not by any means small range of magnificent products of the vine, apart from the world-renowned Port and Madeira. The red wine bred on the banks and in the neighbourhood of the river Dão, which flows through the lofty, narrow gorges formed by the buttresses of the Estrela Mountain, if well made and looked after, without attaining the acme of perfection that characterizes the noblest products of the «Côte d'Or», vies, notwithstanding, and successfully too, with some minor burgundies. And if it does not aspire to a long span of life, it nevertheless keeps its vitality for a good many years, improving all the time.

It requires, however, frequent and careful rackings before being put into bottle lest it should acquire a peculiar and repulsive taste which the French, in their opulent

vinic phraseology, describe as «moisi». And, like its French rivals, it gains by being stored in small casks before being bottled.

The Douro wine-region, or the wine-country, as it was known to our forefathers, in addition to the much celebrated Port, yields also superlative natural wines or «consumos», as they are generally known in the Trade, especially in some small districts, such as Vale de Figueira (Lamego), Valdigem, Pegarinhos, Vila Real &c. One of the Douro vines — Alvarelhão — produces a very attractive wine that improves in bottle and, at the end of a score of years or so, reveals certain organoleptic characteristics which recall to mind the best «Petits Vins» of the Gironde.

Another well-known, if rather limited, wine-producing district is that of Colares, to the north-west of, and not far from, Lisbon, where the vine thrives on sandy soil. The prevailing stock — Ramisco — gives a beautifully coloured, hardish, though extremely pleasant, wine which, at its best, compares favourably with some «Côte d'Or» products.

As to Spanish natural wines, I shall confine myself to stating that, in many a good judge's opinion, some of them are more than worthy of the wine-lover's attention. They are not only skilfully made and treated, but develop well in the bottle, where they keep their qualities for a number of years.

The finest «Riojas», to mention but one of the best known Spanish red wines, I decidedly like and duly enjoy whenever the opportunity of crossing the frontier presents itself.

In the appraisal of Iberian wines, I permit myself to differ from George Saintsbury's otherwise consecrated views. The Professor did not care for the Peninsula's natural wines because, I presume, he never had the

occasion of adequately sampling them. They were, at the time, very little, if at all, known in England.

The only regrettable feature of Spanish table wines is the aping of outstanding French vinous products. The use of such designations as «Cepa Bordéos» and «Cepa Borgoña» ought not to be permitted. In the first place, Spanish wines possess merits of their own to commend themselves to wine-lovers; secondly, denominations as above described, represent a gross infringement not only of international conventions, but of the most rudimentary commercial ethics as well.

The same principle applies to Spanish brandy, which is generally marketed in Spain under the borrowed designation of «Cognac». Cognac indeed! As though the supernacular (to use another of Professor Saintsbury's neologisms) and matchless product of the Charentes, known the world over by the name of Cognac, could ever be confused with the Spanish «aguardientes» or brandies, however palatable these may be, as some of them undoubtedly are.

Of American fortified or dessert wines, which I have had the occasion of tasting during my frequent visits to the States, the less said the better.

Californian port is a heresy — from every angle. And when it is canned, with the recommendation that it should be chilled before serving, the heresy becomes a crime. Again, the idea of calling a colourless alcoholic product white port, thus employing this designation, as it were, in its literal sense, is both a heresy and a crime.

On the other hand, and in fairness to Justice, I am bound to say that I have noticed, of late, a marked improvement in the American natural wines, particularly of the red type, some of which, manufactured by French standards, strike me as quite drinkable. In point of fact, I ran across, in the States, one or two brands (marketed under

French or frenchified names) of red wine purporting to emulate the unexcelled Burgundian product, which, but for a conspicuous absence of that floral bouquet peculiar to the real thing, were more than acceptable. The only pity is that, in order to sell them, American merchants should usurp French and other foreign denominations, as though their own products had not enough merits to be marketed under native brands.

To revert, however, to the right stuff (or to the «real McCoy», as the Yankees put it in their picturesque, though very expressive, idiom) — Claret and Burgundy, I should like to evoke, at this stage, the extremely pleasant memories of a recent dinner at the Oporto British Club, on VE-Day, where a handful of bottles of Château Margaux 1929, which had been purposely kept for that occasion of occasions, were blissfully enjoyed by a restricted but thoroughly appreciative gathering of friends and connoisseurs. But for a very slight suspicion of greenness, it was perfect. The food had been especially ordered to suit not only the Margaux but also the other wines that were consumed on that festive date, and which vied in rank with the Haut-Médoc ambrosia in that serene atmosphere of peace and happiness which befits all superlative wines.

And again, a couple of weeks later, at the same place, a few friends sat round the table to enjoy a noble Burgundy as well, to wit, a Musigny of the same vintage of 1929, which could hardly be surpassed by any of its relatives in vitality, suppleness and elating sensations.

Before closing this chapter on wine and food, I should like to relate an experience that I had, some years ago, at Champigny, in the suburbs of Paris, where, as a guest of honour of a typical French family, I was regaled with one of those repasts the excellence of which appears to

be a jealously kept French secret. When the «Homard au naturel» was served, I noticed that my hosts helped themselves from the Port decanter, and, to my surprise, all the more justified because I had noticed a bottle of Chablis on an adjoining table, Madame—a perfect and lovely hostess—sipping her glass, smilingly nodded at me. I had no choice but to accept an invitation so graciously expressed.

Whether it was the smile, the lobster or the Port, or both, or even the three, that caused me to enjoy the combination, I did not care to find out. The fact remained that on that occasion, at least, both the Douro wine (a fairly good Tawny) and the toothsome crustacean made a perfect love-match.

I wrote «Homard au naturel», and no dressing, please. «Langouste à l'Américaine», as they call it in France, would simply murder the Port owing to the strong flavour of the dressing.

## CHAPTER XIV

In England and also, to some extent, in Portugal, especially at Oporto, in those social circles where the love of tradition, even in gastronomic matters, remains untouched in the hurry and distraction of modern times, Port is invariably served from right to left, that is to say, the host, after filling his glass, passes the decanter to the left, in which direction it is circulated as the guests help themselves. This is a ritualistic practice the origin of which is enshrouded in the mists of time, and which is attributed by some authorities to certain druidical funerary ceremonies. Another school links it with the rotation of the Earth.

Be it as it may, however, my own theory is—everyone will, no doubt, agree—much more rational, and—if I may be permitted to say so—more intelligent. To me, Port is served from right to left because it comes from the heart, and is heartily offered and accepted.

To pass the wine from left to right at a table where this ancient tradition is observed, is tantamount to committing a blunder for which there is no possible excuse. The culprit will be ostracized for the rest of his life.

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I once read in one of the London trade papers that there lived in England, not long ago, a gentleman of the old school who drank, to his dying day, a pint of Port

every night. For this, if not for other reasons, he reached the handsome age of 88. Once, one of his guests — no doubt, one of these «tradition-be-damned» youngsters that infest modern society — asked him (and here I quote «verbatim») if he might smoke while the Port was going round. Of course, gasped the host; then turning to the butler, he added: «John, bring Mr. so-and-so a cigarette, and his hat and coat».

I assume that the old-fashioned gentleman was enjoying, at the moment, a good old Vintage, and I quite appreciate the reason for his wrath.

Undoubtedly, nicotine is enemy N.º 1 of wine and food. It acts as an anaesthetic to the senses of taste and smell. Furthermore, it is — so the scientists proclaim — one of the curses of mankind. Yet, the use of tobacco together with light types of wine, Port included, does not seem to affect many a good judge's sensibility.

Vintage wine in general, and Vintage Port in particular, are entirely out of the question in so far as smoking is concerned — everybody agrees that tobacco takes, so to speak, the life out of them.

On the other hand, Sherry, for instance, and certain types of Port, such as Tawnies or light Tawnies, appear successfully to withstand the smoking test. I will admit that, in this particular case, I may not be able to voice as unbiased an opinion as I would desire or might, perhaps, be expected to, for I am an inveterate smoker. Notwithstanding this, I always refrain from smoking when I am tasting a wine, either in the lodge or anywhere else.

Talking of wine-tasting and smoking, the story used to be current at Gaia, in my younger days, that one of the most gifted tasters that ever engaged in the Trade was wont to do his tasting whilst puffing a large Havana cigar.

His skill attained such heights that once, up the Douro, when tasting the same lot of Vintage Port stored in two vats, he diagnosed that one of the vessels contained the corpse of an animal. The vat was drained forthwith and within there appeared — much to the amazement of the onlookers — the body of a cat which, tired of living, had drowned itself in the intoxicating liquid.

Such a hybrid combination of smoke and wine-tasting, represents, of course, an aberration, and it might be taken as the inevitable exception. Human nature is so fickle that one should not wonder at this and other eccentric manifestations. Each person follows his or her natural inclinations, and the best we can do is to pray the Good Lord to endow us with a well-balanced mind. Yet, no one has a right to spoil other people's pleasure for the sake of gratifying his or her own. So that some conventional principles or rules are set forth and almost generally adhered to. The rule is for one to abstain from smoking until the decanter has gone round once or twice. Then the host, if he feels so inclined (and he generally does if he is a smoker), sets the example by lighting a cigarette, more often than not after the ladies have left the room.

This is the time when the conversation spreads all round the table and assumes that light, witty tone engendered by the wine. It seems that man cannot simultaneously pay tribute to Venus and Bacchus. So, the ladies, without breach of their self-esteem, and in reverence to one of the most highly-prized gifts of Mother Nature, give precedence to the wine and retire to another room, where they are joined, a little later, by the men, now with their hearts warmed and their wits adequately sharpened and, therefore, the better disposed to render the gentle sex the homage it is entitled to.

If Bacchus is represented by a Vintage Port, the host, if he has any kind of respect for his guests or for himself either, will not smoke before the glasses are emptied, and it would be bad manners to start puffing before the example is set by the master of the house. However, if an unpretentious Tawny is served, the host begins to smoke after the first or second glass, and the guests addicted to the vice will follow suit.

I have often smoked at «stick-to-tradition» parties while the Port is being served, even though I do recognize that tobacco numbs the flavour and affects the bouquet of the wine. The truth of it is that if one does not smoke and the others do, the effect on one's senses will be nearly equally detrimental to the enjoyment of the wine.

As a host, I only refrain from smoking when entertaining guests to a superlative wine. I always succeed in persuading my friends to give the wine the chance it claims and fully deserves.

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Port or any other wine for that matter, should not be left in the decanter for any appreciable length of time. It gets surcharged with oxygen, and the noxious ferments floating about in the air crowd into the headspace of the receptacle and assail the wine right away. Eventually the wine turns sour. Therefore, a bottle opened had better be drunk, unless a smaller container, which can be filled to capacity and properly corked, is available.

With a Vintage wine, even this expedient will prove useless. If you open a bottle, you and your friends will have to drink it. Tawny Port will successfully resist being kept in the bottle or the decanter for 24 hours or even longer. Having absorbed throughout its career a

substantial dose of oxygen, Tawny Port does not resent at once the superabundance with which it is now gratified. The Vintage, however, — let me point it out again — is confined to the bottle 2 to 3 years after its birth, and spends its entire life there. The oxygen it assimilates whilst being decanted and in the decanter is responsible for a rapturous excitement indicated by the expansion of esters and corresponding exaltation of virtues. This elating crisis is of short duration, however. The wine then falls a victim to its own delirium and turns flat and, consequently, undrinkable. Climax and anti-climax incited by the same cause in a brief spell of hours — such are the idiosyncrasies of this, the most whimsical of wines, and the quintessence of them, too.

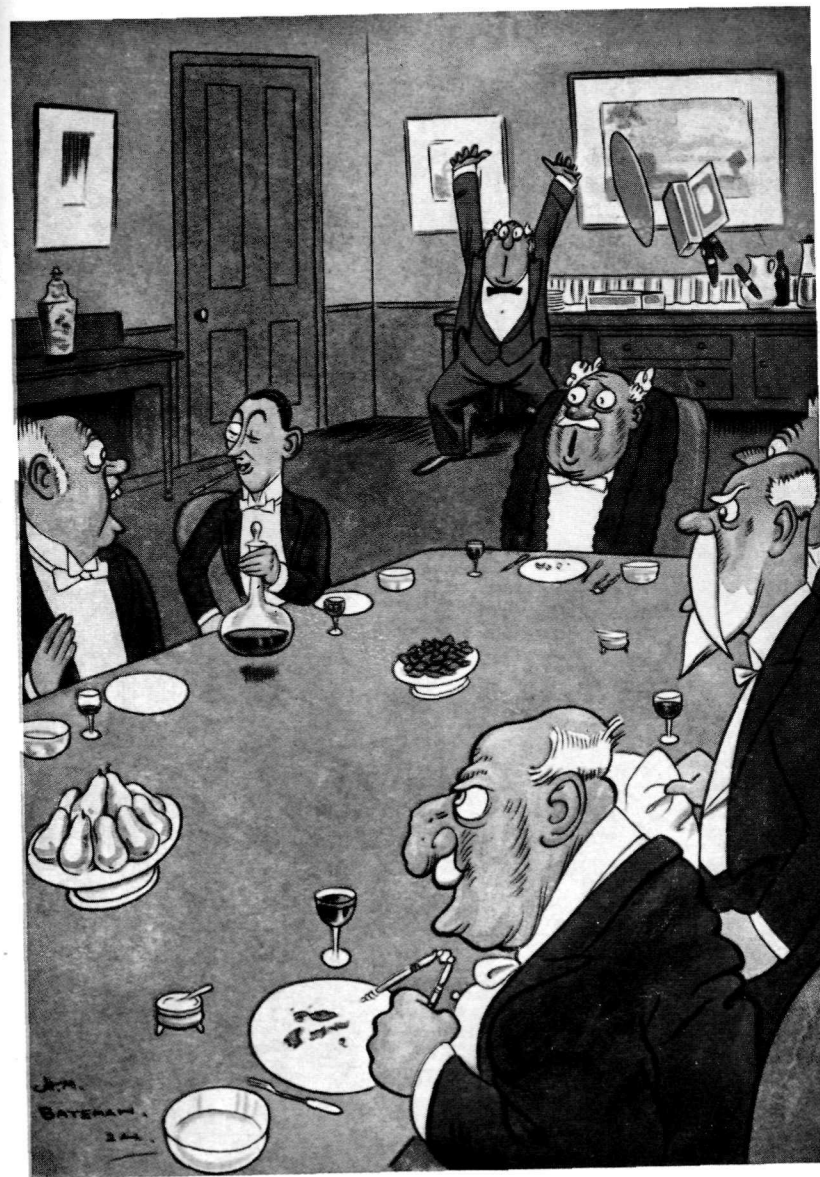
It is a generally acknowledged fact that Sherry improves in the bottle. But its organoleptic make-up is so different from that of Port that, in this respect, no comparison can be established between the two. Moreover, the yeast-film which supposedly jeopardises all wines is instrumental in making of Sherry the wine it is. The secondary fermentation produced by the «*Saccharomyces Beticus*» (Marcilla) imprints character and personality on the exquisite product of Andalusian chalky soil. Oxygen is, therefore, all the more familiar to this wine as, without it, the yeast could neither thrive nor develop its beneficial activities. So that, when passing to the decanter, Sherry feels well-at-ease and keeps its attributes for some time. With this — to the extent of my knowledge — single exception, the ill-effects produced on Port, whether in the decanter or bottle on ullage, by an excess of oxygen, are reproduced in all wines fortified or otherwise. Any wine so kept is apt to get vinegary, and one should not think very highly of the devotee of the art of good living who does not mind drinking wine left over from the previous day.

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What might be termed the «personality» of wine, is not a vague expression, far from it. I do not mean, of course, the physico-chemical and organoleptic traits which are peculiar to every wine worthy of the name. That is taken for granted. What I do wish to point out is that wine in general, and Port in particular, is so sensitive as to acquire the personality of its producer. In other words, each producer and each merchant imprints his own make-up on the wine he grows or sells. Wine from the same property and of the same year, but grown and reared by two different parties, under similar conditions, need not be, and, often enough, is not identical.

Did you ever notice, for instance, that all the brands of Port marketed by a given merchant possess a characteristic of their own, irrespective of style or grade? Let me be more positive and assert, with due respect to all those who drink wine without regard to or concern for its «soul», that a professional taster or even a skilled amateur will detect easily and readily enough the wine shipped or marketed by a given firm, be it red, ruby, tawny or vintage, provided, of course, he is familiar with the brand.

Each brand has its own «facies». More or less fine wine is not only due to the soil and climate, but is, in a certain measure, the result of the artistic skill of its maker and dealer as well. Science may be acquired, but Art is a natural predicate—a gift, in short. The making and treating of Port, or of any other noble wine, is more an Art than a science. And just as well, otherwise the Douro nectar would be relegated to the category of a standardized product, to be judged by the yardstick, and lose all its charm.



THE MAN WHO PASSED THE PORT THE WRONG WAY

BY KIND PERMISSION OF

MESSRS. VAN ZELLERS & CO — OPORTO

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To grow, to raise and to bring up such a «complex and most delicate» organism as Port wine is not within everybody's province. In some instances, the wine reveals its fine structure and noble descent even when young, and cheap if you like. In others (thank goodness, the less frequent), the wine, though from the same district and even the same vineyards, identifies itself with the intruder and acquires an unmistakable coarseness and vulgarity.

A thoroughbred, in order to win the Derby or to achieve an honourable position on the race-track, requires a well-trained and skilful hand. The same principle applies to wine.

«Non licet omnibus adire Corinthum».

## CHAPTER XV

According to the wisdom of the world, which incarnates the right kind of philosophy, self-praise is regarded—and justly so—as an impertinent and despicable indulgence. On this ethical principle, it would appear that the host should refrain from exalting the attributes of his wines before his guests. Yet, such is not the case. No ethical infringement is committed by the host who discusses and extols the quality of his wine provided, of course, that its merits justify the praise and that this is conscientiously felt and voiced. The fortunate possessor of good wine is doubtless entitled to feel proud of it, for good wine is not within everybody's reach, irrespective of material means.

Before you are in a position to select the wines most to your liking, assuming that your choice is of the right kind, you will have to undergo a long, though pleasant, period of training. In the first place, you will have to learn how to distinguish good wine from bad, which is not so simple as you might think. Then, to know the difference between good and excellent wine, in which you will only succeed if you are blessed with a keen nose and palate, a faithful memory, artistic taste, and the critical faculty, and, above all, if you set your heart to cultivate all these attributes with affection and enthusiasm.

Truly, it is a slow education, but it pays in the end. The unparalleled pleasure derived therefrom amply justifies

the means of achieving it. Money is, of course, a primary condition. However, a good wine does not necessarily mean an expensive one. And conversely. Quite frequently, the opposite holds good. Highly-quoted, over-rated wine, sold in bottles enshrined in dust and cobwebs, more often than not leaves the genuine wine-lover and -connoisseur unimpressed for, in 9 times out of 10, such a bottle contains but a worthless beverage, long past its best — at most, a mere relic of past splendour.

The one who is in the «know» always stands a good chance of getting the right stuff at the right price. Loudly-advertised wine is hardly, if ever, worth the money, because the buyer has to pay for propaganda expenses, which in many — far too many — cases, are as high, if not higher, than the original cost of the product.

«Good wine needs no bush», as Shakespeare put it, and if you only know where and how to get it, the chances are — I repeat — that you will secure the right goods for the right price.

There is much in common between wine and women, and I purposely leave out song, not to complicate the issue. A richly-attired female, burdened with extravagant, glittering jewelry, and displaying her wealth and vanity in public, is, to all sensible persons, an object of derision, whereas a self-restrained woman, soberly but elegantly dressed, always proves attractive and commands the admiration of the opposite, if not of her own, sex. The former may gather around her countless admirers, sincere and otherwise, but only the latter inspires the discriminating few with that sense of grace and beauty which characterises the fair sex.

This rough and, I trust, not disparaging parallel is better illustrated by a personal experience, on the other side of the Atlantic. Some merchant-friends of mine,

who had imported, just prior to the war, a sizeable quantity of a noted second growth Claret of the 1929 vintage (one of the finest of the present century in the «Bordellais»), «château»-bottled, were, in 1941, at a loss to dispose of the wine, which they were offering, at the time, to the leading hotels and restaurants of New York at \$1.50 a bottle. They showed me the wine, which I carefully tasted and reverently drank. It was a «winner» from every angle but the selling end. And in the pink of condition, too. My friends informed me that they could barely find a buyer for such a fine wine even at such a ridiculously low price.

In striking contrast with this lack of interest in the vintage Claret, one could see in the windows of liquor stores, in profusion, queer-shaped, loud-labelled bottles of widely-advertised, though indifferent, wine selling at much higher prices. I only wished, then, that the parcel of Claret were on this, instead of the other, side of the Atlantic. Even so, I contributed not a little, I think, within the limitations imposed by my purse, towards the gradual depletion of this parcel, during my rather long sojourn in the American Metropolis.

No, if you are wine-minded, and wise too, take my advice and keep away from century-old and so-called precious vinous rarities, and give your preference to younger wine, in the full possession of its properties.

And when you have round your table a small gathering of wine-discriminating friends, with whom, while the decanter is passed along, you amiably discuss the outstanding features of the wine, or the peculiarities of this or that vintage, in that congenial and carefree atmosphere that befits such a reunion and such a wine or wines, you will then appreciate to the utmost the supreme, the incomparable enchantment of living.

And unless you are the most unmindful of creatures, you will humbly raise your thoughts to the Almighty in token of gratitude for the blissful moments He has deigned to bestow on you.

Remember, though, that moderation—the «Temperantia Victu» of which spake Cicero—is the golden rule of every wine-lover. That moderation which, in the lapidary style of Joseph Hall, is «the silken thread running through the pearl chain of all virtues». And let me quote again the greatest psychologist that ever lived:

*Iago — «Come, come; good wine  
is a good familiar creature,  
if it be well used»*

OTHELLO — sc. iii

as the closing golden key.

Oporto,  
September,  
1945.

## POSTSCRIPT

After reading over the present essay, just before sending it to press, I notice—to my great dismay—that, broadly speaking, and, particularly, in the chapters covering what seems to me the most desirable way of keeping, handling and enjoying a bottle of Port, I have expressed my views in a rather didactic tone. Why, the whole thing is bursting with «should's» and «must's», in a «Magister dixit» attitude.

Truly, I have managed to insert, here and there, a «had better» or «it would be advisable» and other bland expressions (or considered as such), which tend slightly to atone for the sin of self-assertion, which—I am the first to admit—I am sure justly to be accused of by readers and critics, if ever there be any.

I could, of course, have altered the language if I cared to, and I have a feeling that I ought to have done it, even though the procedure implied a certain publishing delay.

On second thoughts, however, I decided to leave it as it is, for, after all, that is the way I set forth my views in my native language, without the merest concern about the «Magister dixit» indictment, to which, before the tribunal of my conscience, I, the humblest of «Discipuli», hasten to plead «not guilty».

V. P.